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Works of Alexandre Dumas

KG 281

CHARLES IX.

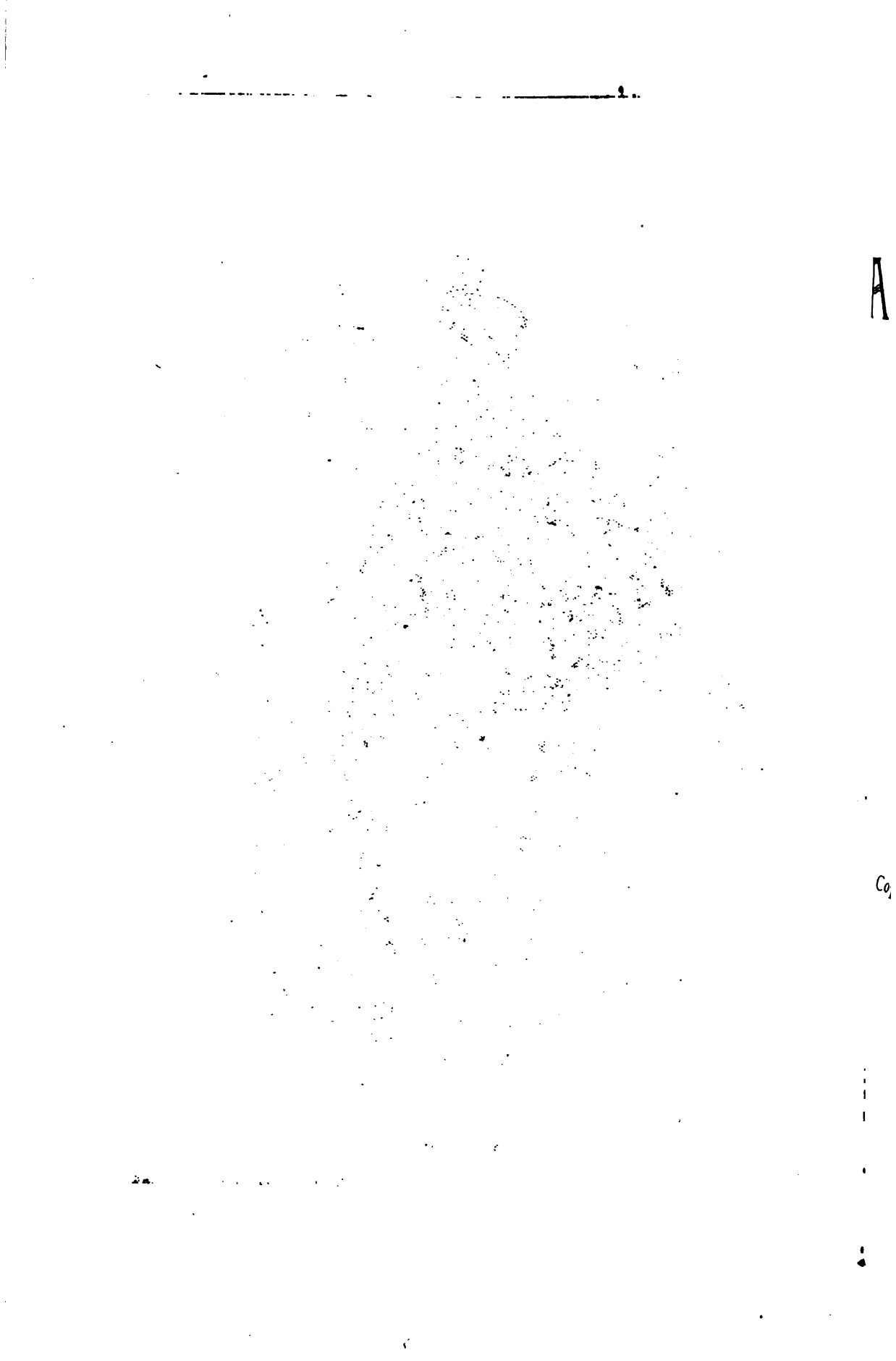
FRONTISPIECE—DUMAS—Volume Five.

THE WORKS

OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

NEW YORK
PETER FENELON COLLIER, PUBLISHER
1893



THE WORKS

OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE

CHICOT, THE JESTER

A SEQUEL TO "MARGUERITE DE VALOIS"

Copiously Illustrated with elegant Pen and Ink and Wood Engravings, specially drawn for this edition by eminent French and American Artists

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COMPLETE IN NINE VOLUMES

VOLUME FIVE

NEW YORK
PETER FENELON COLLIER, PUBLISHER
1893

KG 281

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MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following introductory remarks are extracted from a review of Dumas's Novels, etc., in "Blackwood's Magazine":

"On the eighteenth day of August, 1572, a great festival was held in the palace of the Louvre. It was to celebrate the nuptials of Henry of Navarre and Marguerite de Valois.

"This alliance between the chief of the Protestant party in France, and the sister of Charles IX. and daughter of Catherine de Medicis, perplexed, and in some degree alarmed, the Catholics, while it filled the Huguenots with joy and exultation. The king had declared that he knew and made no difference between Romanist and Calvinist—that all were alike his subjects, and equally beloved by him. He caressed the throng of Huguenot nobles and gentlemen whom the marriage had attracted to the court, was affectionate to his new brother-in-law, friendly with the Prince of Conde, almost respectful to the venerable Admiral de Coligny, to whom he proposed to confide the command of an army in a projected war with Spain. The chiefs of the Catholic party were not behindhand in following the example set them by Charles. Catherine de Medicis was all smiles and affability; the Duke of Anjou, afterward Henry III., received graciously the compliments paid him by the Huguenots themselves on his successes at Jarnac and Montcontour, battles which he had won before he was eighteen years old; Henry of Guise, whose reputation as a leader already, at the age of two-and-twenty, almost equaled that of his great father, was courteous and friendly to those whose deadly foe he had so lately been. The Duke of Mayenne and the admiral, the Guise and the Conde, were seen riding, conversing, and making parties of pleasure together. It was the lion lying down with the lamb.

"On the twenty-second of August, four days after the marriage, in which the Huguenots saw a guarantee of the peaceful exercise of their religion, the Admiral de Coligny was passing through the street of St.-Germain-l'Auxerrois, when he was shot at and wounded by a captain of *Petardiers*, one Maurevel, who went by the name of *Le Tueur du Roi*, literally, the King's Killer. At midnight on the twenty-fourth of August, the tocsin sounded, and the massacre of St. Bartholomew began.

"It is at this stirring period of French history, abounding in horrors and bloodshed, and in plots and intrigues, that M. Alexandre Dumas commences 'Marguerite de Valois.' Beginning with the marriage of Henry and Margaret, he narrates, in his spirited and attractive style, various episodes, real and imaginary, of the great massacre, from the first fury of which Henry himself, doomed to death by the remorseless Catherine de Medicis, was only saved by his own caution, by the indecision of Charles IX., and the energy of Margaret of Valois. The marriage between the king of France's sister and the king of Navarre was merely one of *convenance*, agreed to by Henry for the sake of his fellow Protestants, and used by Catherine and Charles as a lure to bring 'those of the Religion,' as they were called, to Paris, there to be slaughtered, unsuspecting and defenseless. Margaret, then scarcely twenty years of age, had already made herself talked of by her in-

trigues; Henry, who was a few months younger, but who, even at that early period of his life, possessed a large share of the shrewdness and prudence for which his countrymen, the Béarnese, have at all times been noted, was, at the very time of his marriage, deeply in love with the Baroness de Sauve, one of Catherine de Medicis' ladies, by whom he was in his turn beloved. But although little affection existed between the royal pair, the strong links of interest and ambition bound them together; and no sooner were they married, than they entered into a treaty of political alliance, to which, for some time, both steadily and truly adhered.

. . . . . .

"The author, according to his custom, introduces a vast array of characters, for the most part historical, all spiritedly drawn and well sustained. M. Dumas may, in various respects, be held up as an example to our history spoilers, self-styled writers of historical romance, on this side the channel. One does not find him profaning public edifices by causing all sorts of absurdities to pass, and of twaddle to be spoken, within their precincts; neither does he make his kings and beggars, high-born dames and private soldiers, use the very same language, all equally tame, colorless, and devoid of character. The spirited and varied dialogue in which his romances abound, illustrates and brings out the qualities and characteristics of his actors, and is not used for the sole purpose of making a chapter out of what would be better told in a page. In many instances, indeed, it would be difficult for him to tell his story, by the barest narrative, in fewer words than he does by pithy and pointed dialogue."

CHAPTER I.

M. DE GUISE'S LATIN.

On Monday, the 18th of August, 1572, there was a splendid fete at the Louvre.

The windows of the ancient royal residence were brilliantly illuminated, and the squares and streets adjacent, usually so solitary after the clock of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois had tolled nine, were now crowded with people, although it was past midnight.

All this assemblage, threatening, pressing, and turbulent, resembled, in the gloom, a dark and rolling sea, each swell of which increases to a foaming wave; this sea, extending all along the quay, spent its waves at the base of the walls of the Louvre, on the one hand, and against the Hotel de Bourbon, which was opposite, on the other. There was, in spite of the royal fete, and perhaps even because of the royal fete, something threatening in the aspect of the people.

The court was celebrating the marriage of Madame Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henry II. and sister of King Charles IX., with Henry de Bourbon, king of Navarre; and that same morning the Cardinal de Bourbon had united the young couple with the usual ceremonial observed at the marriages of the royal daughters of France, on a stage erected at the entrance to Notre-Dame.

This marriage had astonished everybody, and occasioned much surmise to certain persons who saw clearer than others. They could not comprehend the union of two parties who hated each other so thoroughly as did, at this moment, the Protestant party and the Catholic party; and they wondered how the young Prince de Conde could forgive the Duke d'Anjou, the king's father, for the death of his father, assassinated by Montesquiou, at Jarnac. They asked how the young Duke de Guise could pardon Admiral de Coligny for the death of his father, assassinated at Orleans by Poltrot de Mere. Moreover, Jeanne de Navarre, the courageous spouse of the weak Antoine de Bourbon, who had conducted his son Henry to the royal espousals which awaited him, had died scarcely two months before, and singular reports had been spread abroad as to this sudden death. It was everywhere whispered, and in some places said aloud, that she had discovered some terrible secret; and that Catherine de Medicis, fearing its disclosure, had poisoned her gloves, which had been made by one Rene, her fellow-countryman, and deeply

skilled in such affairs. This report was the more spread and believed, when, after the death of this great queen, at her son's request, two celebrated physicians, one of whom was the famous Ambroise Pare, were instructed to open and examine the body, but not the skull. As it was by the smell that Jeanne de Navarre had been poisoned, it was the brain alone that could present any traces of the crime, and that was the sole part excluded from dissection. We say crime, for no one doubted for a moment that a crime had been committed.

This was not all. The king, Charles, in particular had set his heart on this union, which not only re-established peace in his kingdom, but also attracted to Paris the principal Huguenots of France, and his anxiety almost approached to obstinacy. As the two betrothed belonged one to the Catholic religion and the other to the Reformed religion, they were obliged to obtain a dispensation from Gregory XIII., who then filled the papal chair. The dispensation was slow in coming, and the delay causing great uneasiness to the late queen of Navarre, she had one day expressed to Charles IX. her fears least the dispensation should not arrive; to which the king replied:

"Be under no alarm, my dear aunt. I honor you more than I do the pope, and I love my sister more than I fear his holiness. I am not a Huguenot, but neither am I a fool; and if the pope makes any difficulties, I will myself take Margaret by the hand, and unite her to your son in the sight of open day."

This speech was soon spread through the Louvre and the city, and while it greatly rejoiced the Huguenots, had given the Catholics wherewithal to reflect upon; and they asked one another, with a low voice, if the king really meant to betray them, or was only playing a part which some fine morning or evening might have an unexpected finale.

It was particularly with regard to Admiral de Coligny, who for five or six years had been so bitterly opposed to the king, that the conduct of Charles IX. appeared inexplicable; after having put on his head a price of a hundred and fifty thousand golden crowns, the king now swore by him, called him his father, and declared openly that he should in future confide the conduct of the war to him alone. To such a pitch was this carried, that Catherine de Medicis herself, who until then had controlled the actions, will, and even desires of the young prince, seemed beginning to be really uneasy, and not without reason; for, in a moment of confidence, Charles IX. had said to the admiral, in reference to the war in Flanders, "My father, there is one other thing against which we must be on our guard, and this is, that the queen, my mother, who likes to poke her nose everywhere, as you well know, shall learn nothing of this undertaking; we must keep it so quiet that she does not hear a word of it, or, meddler as she is, she will spoil all."

Now, wise and experienced as he was, Coligny had not kept this counsel secret; and, albeit he had come to Paris with great suspicions, and albeit at his departure from Chatillon a peasant had thrown herself at his feet, crying, "Ah! sir, our good master, do not go to Paris, for if you do you will die—you and all who are with you!"—these suspicions were lulled and almost destroyed in his breast, and in that of Teligny, his son-in-law, to whom the king was especially kind and attentive, calling him "brother," as he called the admiral his "father," and behaving to him as he did to his best friends.

The Huguenots, then, excepting some few morose and suspicious spirits, were completely reassured. The death of the queen of Navarre passed over, as having been caused by a pleurisy, and the spacious apartments of the Louvre were filled with those brave Protestants to whom the marriage of their young chief, Henry, promised an unexpected return of good fortune. Admiral Coligny, La Rochefoucault, the young Prince de Conde, Teligny, in short, all the leaders of the party were triumphant when they saw so powerful at the Louvre, and so welcome in Paris, those whom, three months before, King Charles and Queen Catherine would have hanged on gibbets higher than those of assassins.

The king, the queen, the Duke d'Anjou, and the Duke d'Alencon did the honors of the royal fete with all courtesy and kindness.

The Duke d'Anjou received from the Huguenots themselves well-merited compliments as to the two battles of Jarnac and Montcontour, which he had gained before he was eighteen years of age, more precocious in that than either Cæsar or Alexander, to whom they compared him, of course placing the conquerors of Pharsalia and Issus as inferior to the living prince. The Duke d'Alencon looked on, with his bland, false smile, while Queen Catherine, radiant with joy and diffuse in compliment, congratulated Prince Henry de Conde on his recent marriage with Marie de Cleves, and the Messieurs de Guise themselves looked gracious on the formidable enemies of their house, and the Duke de Mayenne discoursed with M. de Tavanne and the admiral on the impending war, which was now more than ever threatened against Philippe II.

In the midst of these groups moved backward and forward, his head a little on one side, his ear open to all that was said, a young man about nineteen years of age, with a keen eye, black hair cut very close, thick eyebrows, and a nose curved like an eagle's, with a sneering smile and a growing mustache and beard. This young man, who had first distinguished himself at the battle of Arnay-le-Duc, for which he had been very highly complimented, was the dearly beloved pupil of Coligny, and the hero of the day. Three months anterior, that is to say, when his mother was living, they called him the Prince of Béarn, now he was called the king of Navarre, and in after-time, Henry IV.

From time to time a gloomy cloud passed suddenly and rapidly over his brow; questionless, he recollected that "two months, two little months," had scarce elapsed since his mother's death, and he less than any one doubted that she had been poisoned. But the cloud was transitory, and disappeared like a fleeting shadow, for they who spoke to him, they who congratulated him, they who elbowed him, were they who had assassinated the brave Jeanne d'Albret.

Some paces distant from the king of Navarre, almost as pensive and gloomy as the king affected to be joyous and free from cares, was the young Duke de Guise, conversing with Teligny. More fortunate than the Béarnais, at two-and-twenty he had almost attained the reputation of his father, Francois, the great Duke de Guise. He was an elegant gentleman, very tall, with a noble and haughty look, and gifted with that natural majesty, which caused it to be said that by his side other princes seemed to belong to the people. Young as he was, the Catholics looked up to him as the chief of their party, as the Huguenots considered Henry of Navarre, whose portrait we have just drawn, to be their chief. He had heretofore borne the title of Prince de Joinville, and at the siege of Orleans fought his first fight under his father, who died in his arms, denouncing Admiral Coligny as his assassin. It was then the young duke, like Hannibal, took a solemn oath to avenge his father's death on the admiral and his family, and to pursue the foes to his religion without truce or respite, promising God to be his exterminating angel on earth, until the very last heretic should be cut off. It was therefore with the deepest astonishment that the people saw this prince, usually so faithful to his word, extend the hand of fellowship to those whom he had sworn to hold as his eternal enemies, and discourse familiarly with the son-in-law of the man whose death he had promised to his dying father.

But, as we have said, this was an evening of astonishments.

All continued smilingly within, and a murmur more soft and flattering that ever pervaded the Louvre at the moment when the youthful bride, after having laid aside her toilet of ceremony, her long mantle and flowing veil, returned to the ball-room, accompanied by the lovely Duchesse de Nevers, her most intimate friend, and led by her brother, Charles IX., who presented her to the principal guests.

The bride was the daughter of Henry II., was the pearl of the crown of France, MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, whom, in his familiar tenderness for her, King Charles IX. always called *ma sœur Margot*, "my sister Madge."

Never was a more flattering reception, never one more merited, than that which awaited the new queen of Navarre. Marguerite at this period was scarcely twenty, and already she was the object of all the poets' eulogies, some of whom compared her to Aurora, others to Cytherea; she was, in truth, a beauty without rival in that court in which Catherine de Medicis had assembled the loveliest women of the age and country.

She had black hair and a brilliant complexion; a voluptuous eye, veiled by long lids, coral and delicate lips, a graceful neck, a full, enchanting figure, and concealed in a satin slipper a tiny foot, scarce larger than an infant's. The French, who possessed her, were proud to see so lovely a flower flourishing in their soil, and foreigners who passed through France returned home dazzled with her beauty, if they had but seen her, and amazed at her knowledge, if they had discoursed with her; for not only was Marguerite the loveliest, she was also the most erudite, woman of her time, and on all sides was quoted the remark of an Italian *savant* who had been presented to her, and who, after having conversed with her for an hour in Italian, Spanish and Latin, had said, on quitting her presence: "To see the court without seeing Marguerite de Valois, is to see neither France nor the court."

Thus it may be supposed that addresses to King Charles IX. and the queen of Navarre were not wanting. The Huguenots were great hands at addresses. Many strong hints to the past, and stronger hints as to the future, were adroitly slipped into these harangues; but to all such allusions and speeches he replied, with his pale lips and artificial smiles:

"In giving my sister Margot to Henry of Navarre, I give my sister to all the Protestants of the kingdom."

This phrase assured some and made others smile, for it had really a double sense: the one paternal, and with which Charles IX. would not load his mind; the other, injurious to the bride, her husband, and also to him who said it, for it recalled some scandalous rumors with which the chroniclers of the court had already found means to smirch the nuptial robe of Marguerite de Valois.

However, M. de Guise was conversing, as we have described, with Teligny; but he did not pay to the conversation such sustained attention but that he turned away somewhat, from time to time, to cast a glance at the group of ladies, in the center of whom glittered the queen of Navarre. When the princess's eye thus met that of the young duke, a cloud seemed to overspread that lovely brow, around which stars of diamonds formed a tremulous circlet, and some agitating thought might be divined in her restless and impatient manner.

The Princess Claude, the eldest sister of Marguerite, who had been for some years married to the Duke of Lorraine, had observed this uneasiness, and going up to her, was about to inquire the cause, when all stood aside at the approach of the queen-mother, who came forward, leaning on the arm of the young Prince de Conde, and the princess was thus suddenly shut out from her sister. There was then a general movement, by which the Duke de Guise profited to approach Madame de Nevers, his sister-in-law, and Marguerite.

Madame de Lorraine, who had not lost sight of her sister, then remarked, instead of the cloud which she had before observed on her forehead, a burning blush come into her cheeks. The duke approached still nearer, and when he was within two steps of Marguerite, she appeared rather to feel than see his presence, and turned round, making a violent effort over herself in order to give her features an appearance of calmness and indifference. The duke, then respectfully bowing, murmured, in a low tone, "*Ipse attuli.*"—"I have brought it."

Marguerite returned the salute of the

and love-promising eyes to the king, whose heart beat with joy.

"And then," said Henry, "what will you say?"

"I will say," replied Charlotte, "that your majesty really loves me."

"Ventre-saint-gris! then you shall say it. Have you not about you some waiting-woman whom you can trust?"

"Yes, Dariole is devoted to me."

"Sang-Diou! then say to her, that I will make her fortune when I am king of France, as the astrologers prophesy."

Charlotte smiled, for even at this period the Gascon reputation of the Béarnais was already established with respect to his promises.

"Well, then, what do you desire of Dariole?"

"Little for her, a great deal for me. Your apartment is over mine?"

"Yes."

"Let her wait behind the door. I will strike three blows gently, and—"

Madame de Sauve kept silence for several seconds, and then, as if she had looked around her to observe if she were overheard, she fastened her gaze for a moment on the group which environed the queen-mother: brief as the moment was, it was sufficient for Catherine and her lady-in-waiting to exchange a look.

"Oh, if I were inclined," said Madame de Sauve, with a siren's accent that would have melted Ulysses himself—"if I were inclined to make your majesty tell a falsehood—"

"Ma mie, try—"

"Ah, ma foi! I confess I am tempted to do so."

"Women are never so strong as after their defeat."

"Sire, I hold you to your promise for Dariole, when you shall be king of France."

Henry uttered an exclamation of joy.

It was at the precise moment when the cry escaped the lips of the Béarnais that the queen of Navarre replied to the Duke of Guise: "*Noctu pro more.*"

Then Henry quitted Madame de Sauve as happy as the Duke de Guise when he quitted Marguerite de Valois.

An hour after the double scene we have just related, King Charles and the queen-mother also retired to their apartments. Almost immediately the apartments began to empty; the galleries exhibited the bases of their marble columns. The admiral and the Prince de Conde were escorted home by four hundred Huguenot gentlemen through the middle of the crowd, which groaned as they passed. Then Henry de Guise, with the Lorraine and Catholic gentlemen, left in their turn, greeted by the cries of joy and plaudits of the people.

As to Marguerite de Valois, Henry of Navarre, and Madame de Sauve, they lived in the Louvre.

CHAPTER II.

HENRY OF NAVARRE AND MARGUERITE.

THE Duke de Guise escorted his sister-in-law, the Duchesse de Nevers, to his hotel in the Rue du Chaume, and then proceeded to his own apartment to change his dress, put on a night cloak, and arm himself with one of those short and sharp poniards which were called *foi de gentilhomme,* and were worn without swords; but at the moment when he took it off the table on which it was placed he perceived a small billet between the blade and the scabbard.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"I hope M. de Guise will not return to the Louvre to-night; or if he does, that he will at least take the precaution to arm himself with a good coat of mail and a proved sword."

"Ah! ah!" said the duke, "this is a singular warning; but I always take good advice — my steel jacket and my sword."

The valet-de-chambre, accustomed to these changes of costume, brought both. The duke put on his jacket, which was made of rings of steel so fine that it was scarcely thicker than velvet; he then drew on a pardessus and pourpoint of gray and silver, his favorite colors, placed a dagger by his side, handed his sword to a page, the only attendant he allowed to accompany him, and took the way to the Louvre, which he reached in safety.

In front of the royal chateau was a deep fosse, looking into which were the chambers of most of the princes who inhabited the palace. Marguerite's apartment was on the first floor, and, easily accessible but for the fosse, was, in consequence of the depth to which that was cut, thirty feet from the bottom of the wall, and consequently out of the reach of robbers or lovers; but nevertheless the Duke de Guise approached it without hesitation.

At the same moment was heard the noise of a window which opened on the ground floor. This window was grated, but a hand appeared, lifted out one of the bars that had been loosened, and dropped from it a silken lace.

"Is that you, Gillonne?" said the duke in a low voice.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied a female voice, in a still lower tone.

"And Marguerite?"

"Awaits you."

"'Tis well."

Hereupon the duke made a signal to his page, who, opening his cloak, took out a small rope ladder. The prince fastened one end to the silk lace, and Gillonne drawing it up, fastened it, and the prince, after having buckled his sword to his belt, ascended without accident. When he entered, the bar was replaced and the window closed, while the page, having seen his master quietly enter the Louvre, to the windows of which he had accompanied him twenty times in the same way, laid himself down in his cloak on the grass of the fosse, and beneath the shadow of the wall.

The night was extremely dark, and several large rain-spots fell from the heavy clouds charged with electric fluid.

The Duke de Guise followed his conductress, who was no other than the daughter of Jacques de Mantignon, marechal of France. She was the confidante of Marguerite, who kept no secret from her; and it was said that among the number of mysteries intrusted to her incorruptible fidelity, there were some so terrible as to compel her to keep the rest.

There was no light left either in the lower chamber or in the corridor, only from time to time a livid glare illuminated the dark apartments with a vivid flash, which as instantly disappeared.

The duke, still guided by his conductress, who held his hand, reached a staircase formed in the thickness of the wall, and which opened by a secret and invisible door into the antechamber of Marguerite's apartment. In this antechamber, which was perfectly dark, Gillonne stopped.

"Have you brought what the queen requested?" she inquired, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied the Duke de Guise; "but I will only give it to her majesty in person."

"Come, then, and do not lose an instant!" said a voice from the darkness, which made the duke start, for it was Marguerite's.

At the same moment a curtain of violet velvet covered with fleurs-de-lis was raised, and the duke made out the form of the queen, who, in her impatience, had come to meet him.

"I am here, madame," he then said; and he passed the curtain, which fell behind him. Gillonne remained in the antechamber.

As if she comprehended the jealousies of the duke, Marguerite led him to the bed-chamber, and then paused.

"Well," she said, "are you content, duke?"

"Content, madame?" was the reply--"and with what?"

"Of the proof I give you," retorted Marguerite, with a slight tone of vexation in her voice, "that I belong to a man, who, on the very night of his marriage, makes me of such small importance that he does not even come to thank me for the honor I have done him, not in selecting, but in accepting him for my husband."

"Oh! madame," said the duke, sorrowfully, "be assured he will come if you desire it."

"And is it you who say that, Henry?" cried Marguerite; "you, who better than any know the contrary of what you say. If I had that desire, should I have asked you to come to the Louvre?"

"You have asked me to come to the Louvre, Marguerite, because you are anxious to destroy every vestige of the past, and because that past lives not only in my memory, but in this silver casket which I bring to you."

"Henry, shall I say one thing to you?" replied Marguerite; "it is that you are more like a schoolboy than a prince. I deny that I have loved you! I desire to quench a flame which will die, perhaps, but whose reflection will never die! No, no, duke; you may keep the letters of your Marguerite, and the casket she has given you. From these letters she asks but one, and that only, because it is as dangerous for you as for herself."

"It is all yours," said the duke.

Marguerite searched anxiously in the open casket, and with a tremulous hand took, one after the other, a dozen letters, of which she examined the addresses only, as if by the inspection alone of these she could recall to her memory what the letters themselves contained; but, after a close scrutiny, she looked at the duke, pale and agitated:

"Sir," she said, "what I seek is not here. Have you lost it, by any accident?"

"What letter do you seek, madame?"

"That in which I told you to marry without delay."

"As an excuse for your infidelity?"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders.

"No; but to save your life. That one in which I say to you that the king, seeing our love and my exertions to break off your proposed espousals with the Infanta of Portugal, had sent for his brother, the Bastard of Angouleme, and said to him, pointing to two swords, 'With this slay Henry de Guise this night, or with the other I will slay thee in the morning.' Where is that letter?"

"Here," said the duke, drawing it from his breast.

Marguerite snatched it from his hands, opened it anxiously, assured herself that it was really that which she desired, uttered an exclamation of joy, and applying the lighted candle to it, the flames instantly consumed the paper; then, as if Marguerite feared that her imprudent words might be read in the very ashes, she trampled them underfoot.

During all this, the Duke de Guise had watched his mistress attentively.

"Well, Marguerite," he said, when she had finished, "are you satisfied now?"

"Yes, for now you have wedded the Princess de Porcian, my brother will forgive me your love: while he never would have pardoned me for revealing a secret such as that which in my weakness for you I had not the strength to conceal from you."

"True," replied De Guise, "then, you loved me."

"And I love you still, Henry, as much—more than ever!"

"You . . . .?"

"I do; for never more than at this moment did I need a sincere and devoted friend. Queen, I have no throne: wife, I have no husband!"

The young prince shook his head sorrowfully.

"I tell you, I repeat to you, Henry, that my husband not only does not love me, but hates—despises me; besides, methinks, your presence in the chamber in which he ought to be is full of proof of this hatred, this contempt."

"It is not yet late, madame, and the king of Navarre requires time to dismiss his gentlemen; and if he has not already come, he will not be long first."

"And I tell you," cried Marguerite, with increasing vexation. "I tell you that he will not come!"

"Madame!" exclaimed Gillonne, suddenly entering—"the king of Navarre is just leaving his apartment!"

"Oh, I knew he would come!" exclaimed the Duke de Guise.

"Henry," said Marguerite, in a quick tone, and seizing the duke's hand, "Henry, you shall see if I am a woman of my word, and if I may be relied on. Henry, enter that closet."

"Madame, allow me to go while it is yet time, for reflect that the first mark of love you bestow on him, I shall quit the cabinet, and then woe to him!"

"Are you mad? go in—go in, I say,

and I will be responsible for all." And she pushed the duke into the closet.

It was time. The door was scarcely closed behind the prince, than the king of Navarre, escorted by two pages, who carried eight flambeaux of pink wax in two candelabras, appeared smiling, on the threshold of the chamber.

Marguerite concealed her trouble, and made a very low courtesy.

"You are not yet in bed, madame," observed the Béarnais, with his frank and joyous look. "Were you by chance waiting for me?"

"No, sir," replied Marguerite; "for yesterday you repeated to me that our marriage was a political alliance, and that you would never thwart my wishes."

"Assuredly; but that is no reason why we should not confer a little together. Gillonne, close the door, and leave us."

Marguerite, who was sitting, then rose and extended her hand, as if to desire the pages to remain.

"Must I call your women?" inquired the king. "I will do so, if such be your desire, although I confess that what I have to say to you would make me prefer our being alone."

And the king of Navarre advanced toward the closet.

"No!" exclaimed Marguerite, hastily going before him; "no—there is no occasion for that; I am ready to hear you."

The Bearnais had learned what he desired to know—he threw a rapid and penetrating glance toward the cabinet, as if, in spite of the thick curtain which hung before it, he would dive into its obscurity, and then, turning his looks to his lovely wife, pale with terror, he said, with the utmost composure.

"In that case, madame, let us confer for a few moments."

"As your majesty pleases," said the lady, falling into, rather than sitting upon, the seat which her husband pointed out to her.

The Béarnais placed himself beside her.

"Madame," he continued, "whatever many persons may have said, I think our marriage is a good marriage. I stand well with you—you stand well with me."

"But—" said Marguerite, alarmed.

"Consequently, we ought," observed the king of Navarre, "to act to each other like good allies, since we were today allied in the presence of God. Don't you think so?"

"Unquestionably, sir."

"I know, madame, how great your penetration is; I know how the ground at court is intersected with dangerous abysses; now I am young, and although I never injured any person, I have a great many enemies. In which camp, madame, ought I to range her who bears my name, and who has vowed her affection to me at the foot of the altar?"

"Sir, could you think—"

"I think nothing, madame; I hope, and I am anxious to know that my hope is well founded. It is quite certain that our marriage is merely a pretext or a snare."

Marguerite started, for perchance the same thought had occurred to her own mind.

"Now, then, which of the two?" continued Henry of Navarre. "The king hates me, the Duke d'Anjou hates me, the Duke d'Alencon hates me, Catherine de Medicis hated my mother too much not to hate me."

"Oh, sir, what are you saying?"

"The truth, madame," replied the king; "and I wish, in order that it may not be supposed that I am the dupe of the assassination of M. de Mouy and the poisoning of my mother, that some one were here who could hear me."

"Oh, sir," replied Marguerite, with an air as calm and smiling as she could assume, "you know very well that there is no person here but you and myself."

"It is for that very reason that I thus give vent to my thoughts; this it is that emboldens me to declare that I am not the dupe of the caresses showered on me by the House of France or the House of Lorraine."

"Sir, sir!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Well, what is it, ma mie?" inquired Henry, smiling in his turn.

"Why, sir, such remarks are very dangerous."

"Not when we are alone," observed the king. "I was saying—"

Marguerite was evidently distressed; she desired to stop every word the king uttered, but he continued, with his apparent indifference—

"I was telling you, that I was menaced on all sides; menaced by the king, menaced by the Duke d'Alencon, menaced by the Duke d'Anjou, menaced by the queen-mother, menaced by the Duke de Guise, by the Duke de Mayenne, by the Cardinal de Lorraine—menaced, in fact, by everybody. One feels that instinctively, as you know, madame. Well, against all these menaces, which must soon become attacks, I can defend myself by your aid, for you are beloved by all the persons who detest me."—"I?" said Marguerite.

"Yes, you," replied Henry, with the utmost easiness of manner; "yes, you are beloved by King Charles, you are beloved (he laid strong emphasis on the word) by the Duke d'Alencon, you are beloved by Queen Catherine, and you are beloved by the Duke de Guise."

"Sir!" murmured Marguerite.

"Yes; and what is there astonishing in the fact of all the world loving you? All I have mentioned are your brothers or relatives. To love one's brothers and relatives is to live according to the heart of God."

"But what, then," asked Marguerite, greatly overcome—"what would you have?"

"I would say, that if you will—I will not ask you to love me—but if you will be my ally, I could brave everything; while, on the other hand, if you become my enemy, I am lost."

"Oh, your enemy!—never, sir!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"And my love—never either?"

"Perhaps—"

"And my ally?"

"Most decidedly."

And Marguerite turned round, and presented her hand to the king.

Henry took it, kissed it gallantly, and retaining it in his own, more from a desire of investigation than from any sentiment of tenderness, said:

"Well, madame, I believe you, and accept the alliance. They married us without our knowing each other—without our loving each other; they married us without consulting us—us whom they united. We therefore owe nothing to each other, as man and wife; but we ally ourselves freely and without any compulsion. We ally ourselves, as two loyal hearts who owe each other mutual protection should ally themselves; 'tis as such you understand it?"

"Yes, sir," said Marguerite, endeavoring to withdraw her hand.

"Well, then," continued the Béarnais, with his eyes fixed on the cabinet, "as the first proof of a frank alliance is the most perfect confidence, I will now, madame, relate to you, in all its details, the plan I have formed, in order that we may victoriously meet and overcome all these enemies."

"Sir," said Marguerite, turning her eyes toward the closet, while the Béarnais, seeing his trick succeed, laughed in his sleeve.

"This is what I mean to do," he continued, without appearing to remark the uneasiness of his young wife, "I intend—"

"Sir," said Marguerite, rising hastily, and seizing the king's arm—"allow me a little breath; my emotion—the heat—overpowers me."

And, in truth, Marguerite was as pale and trembling as if she was about to fall on the carpet.

Henry went straight to a window some distance off, and opened it. This window looked on the river.

Marguerite followed him. "Silence, sire—silence, for pity's sake!" she murmured.

"What, madame," said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, "did you not say we were alone?"

"Yes, sir; but have you not heard me say that by the aid of a tube introduced into the ceiling or the wall everything could be heard?"

"Well, madame, well," said the Béarnais, earnestly, and in a low voice; "it is true you do not love me, but you are, at least, honorable."

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"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that if you were capable of betraying me, you would have allowed me to continue, as I might have betrayed myself. You stopped me—I now know that some one is concealed here—that you are an unfaithful wife, but a faithful ally; and, at this moment, I have more need of fidelity in politics than in love."

"Sir!" replied Marguerite, confused.

"Good, good; we will talk of this hereafter," said Henry, "when we know each other better."

Then, raising his voice—"Well," he continued, "do you breathe more freely now, madame?"

"Yes, sir—yes."

"Well, then," said the Béarnais, "I will no longer intrude on you. I owed you my respects, and some advances toward better acquaintance; deign, then, to accept them, as they are offered, with all my heart, Good-night, and happy slumbers!"

Marguerite raised to her husband her eyes, brilliant with gratitude, and, in her turn, extended her hand.

"It is agreed," she said.

"Political alliance, frank and loyal?" asked Henry.

"Frank and loyal," was the reply.

And the Béarnais went toward the door, followed by Marguerite's look. Then, when the curtain had fallen between them and the bedchamber:

"Thanks, Marguerite, he said, in a quick and low tone, "thanks! You are a true daughter of France. I leave you quite tranquil; lacking your love, your friendship will not fail me. I rely on you, as you, for your part, may rely on me. Adieu, madame."

And Henry kissed his wife's hand, and pressed it gently. Then with a quick step he returned to his own apartment, saying to himself, in a low voice, in the corridor:

"Who the devil is with her? Is it the king, or the Duke d'Anjou, or the Duke d'Alencon, or the Duke de Guise? is it a brother or a lover—is it both? I'faith, I am almost sorry now I asked the baroness for this rendezvous; but, as my word is pledged, and Dariole awaits me, no matter. Yet, *ventre-saint-gris!* this Margot, as my brother-in-law, King Charles, calls her, is an adorable creature."

And with a step which betrayed a slight hesitation, Henry of Navarre ascended the staircase which led to Madame de Sauve's apartments.

Marguerite had followed him with her eyes until he disappeared. Then she returned to her chamber, and found the duke at the door of the cabinet. The sight almost touched her with remorse.

The duke was grave, and his knitted brow bespoke bitter reflection.

"Marguerite is neutral to-day," he said—"Marguerite will be hostile in a week."

"Ah! you have been listening?" said Marguerite.

"What else could I do in the cabinet?"

"And did you find that I behaved otherwise than the queen of Navarre should behave?"

"No; but differently from the way in which the mistress of the Duke de Guise should behave."

"Sir," replied the queen, "I may not love my husband, but no one has the right to require me to betray him. Would you yourself reveal the secrets of the Princess de Porcian, your wife?"

"Come, come, madame," answered the duke, shaking his head, "this is very well; I see that you do not love me as in those days when you disclosed to me the plot of the king against me and my party."

"The king was strong and you were weak; Henry is weak, and you are strong. You see I play a consistent part."

"Only you pass from one camp to another."

"That was a right I acquired, sir, in saving your life."

"Good, madame: and as when lovers separate, they return all the gifts that have passed between them, I will save your life, in my turn, and we shall be quits."

And bowing politely, the duke left the

room, nor did Marguerite attempt to retain him.

In the antechamber he found Gillonne, who guided him to the window on the ground floor, and in the fosse he found his page, with whom he returned to the Hotel de Guise.

Marguerite went to the opened window.

"What a marriage night!" she murmured to herself; "the husband flies—the lover forsakes me!"

She shut the window, and called Gillonne to help her to undress and retire to bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE POET-KING.

THE morrow and the following days were passed in a succession of balls, tournaments, and banquets. The king seemed to have laid aside his usual melancholy, and the queen-mother was so occupied with embroidery, ornaments, and plumes, that she could not sleep.

The Huguenots, in some measure appeased, began to assume silken pourpoints, wear devices, and parade before certain balconies, as if they were Catholics.

On every side the reaction in favor of the Protestants was so great, that it seemed the court was about to become Protestant itself; even the admiral, in spite of his discernment, was deceived, and was so carried away, that one evening he forgot for two whole hours his toothpick, which he always used from two o'clock, the hour at which he dined, until eight o'clock at night, when he sat down to supper.

The evening on which the admiral thus unaccountably deviated from his usual habit, King Charles IX. had invited Henry of Navarre and the Duke de Guise to sup with him: after the repast, he went into his chamber, and was busily explaining to them the mechanism of a wolf-trap he had invented, when, interrupting himself—"The admiral does not come to-night," said he; "who has seen him to-day, and can tell me anything about him?"

"I have," said the king of Navarre; "and should your majesty be anxious about him, I can reassure you, for I saw him this morning at six, and this evening at seven o'clock."

"Ah, ah!" replied the king, whose eyes were instantly fixed with a searching expression on his brother-in-law; "for a new-married man, Harry, you are very early."

"Yes, sire," answered the king of Navarre, "I wished to inquire of the admiral, who knows everything, whether some gentlemen I expect are on their way hither."

"More gentlemen! why, you had eight hundred on the day of your wedding, and fresh ones join you every day. You are surely not going to invade us?" said Charles IX., smiling.

The Duke de Guise frowned.

"Sire," returned the Béarnais, "a war with Flanders is spoken of, and I am collecting round me all those gentlemen of my country whom I think can be useful to your majesty."

The duke, calling to mind the pretended project Henry had mentioned to Marguerite the day of their marriage, listened still more attentively.

"Well, well," replied the king, with a sinister smile, "the more the better; let them all come. But who are these gentlemen?—brave ones, I trust?"

"I know not, sire, if my gentlemen will ever equal those of your majesty, of the Duke d'Anjou, of the Duke de Guise, but I know that they will do their best."

"Do you expect many?"

"Ten or twelve, perhaps."

"What are their names?"

"Sire, I cannot at this moment call any of them to mind, with the exception of one, whom Teligny recommends to me as a most accomplished gentleman, and whose name is De la Mole."

"De la Mole!" said the king, who was perfectly acquainted with the genealogy of all the noble families of France—"is he not a Lerac de la Mole, a Provencal?"

"Exactly so, sire; you see, I recruit even in Provence."

"And I," added the Duke de Guise, with a sarcastic smile, "go even further

than the king of Navarre, for I seek even in Piedmont all the brave Catholics I can find."

"Catholic or Huguenot," interrupted the king, "it little matters to me, so they are brave."

The expression of the king's face while he uttered these words, which thus united Catholics and Huguenots in his thoughts, was so full of indifference that the duke himself was surprised.

"Your majesty is occupied with the Flemings," said the admiral, to whom Charles had some days previously accorded the favor of entering without being announced, and who had overheard the king's last words.

"Ah! here is my father, the admiral!" cried Charles, opening his arms. "We were speaking of battles, of gentlemen, of brave men—and *he* comes. It is like the loadstone, that attracts the iron. My brother-in-law of Navarre and my cousin of Guise were speaking of re-enforcements they expect for your army. That was the subject of our conversation."

"And these re-enforcements are come," said the admiral.

"Have you any intelligence of them, monsieur?" asked the Béarnais.

"Yes, my son, and particularly of M. de la Mole; he was at Orleans yesterday, and will be in Paris to-morrow, or the day after."

"The devil! You must be a sorcerer, M. l'Amiral," said the Duke de Guise, "to know what is passing at thirty or forty leagues' distance. For my part, I should like to know for a certainty what will happen, or what has happened, at Orleans."

Coligny remained unmoved by this speech, which evidently alluded to the death of Francois de Guise, the duke's father, killed before Orleans by Poltrot de Mere, and not without a suspicion of the admiral's having been concerned in the murder.

"Sir," replied he, coldly, and with dignity, "I am a sorcerer whenever I wish to know anything that concerns my own affairs or those of the king. My courier arrived an hour ago from Orleans, having traveled, thanks to the post, thirty-two leagues in a day. As M. de la Mole only has his own horse, he rides but ten leagues a-day, and can only arrive in Paris on the 24th. Here is all my magic."

"Bravo, my father!" cried Charles IX.; "teach these young men what the wisdom is, accompanied by age, which has whitened your hair and beard; so now we will send them to talk of love and tournaments, and we will ourselves discourse of our wars. Good councilors make good kings. Leave us, gentlemen; we would be alone."

The two young men left the apartment; the king of Navarre first, then the Duke de Guise; but outside the door they separated, after a formal salute.

Coligny followed them with his eyes, not without disquietude; for he never saw these two men, who cherished so deadly a hate against each other, meet, without a dread that some spark would kindle a conflagration. Charles saw what was passing in his mind, and, laying his hand on his arm:

"Fear nothing, my father: I am here to preserve peace and obedience. I am really a king, now that my mother is no longer queen, and she is no longer queen since Coligny became my father."

"Oh, sire!" said the admiral, "the Queen Catherine—"

"Is a quarrel-monger. Peace is impossible with her. These Italian Catholics are furious, and will hear of nothing but extermination; now, for my part, I not only wish to pacify, but I wish to protect those of the Reformed religion. The others are too dissolute, and scandalize me with their amours and their quarrels. Shall I speak frankly to you?" continued Charles, redoubling in energy. "I mistrust every one about me, except my new friends. I suspect the ambition of Tavannes; Vieilleville only cares for good wine, and would betray his king for a cask of Malvoisie; Montmorency only thinks of the chase, and lives among his dogs and falcons; the Count de Retz is a Spaniard; the Guises are Lorraines. I think there are no true Frenchmen in France, except myself, my brother-in-

law of Navarre, and yourself; but I am chained to the throne, and cannot command the army; it is as much as I can do to hunt at St. Germains or Rambouillet. My brother-in-law of Navarre is too young and too inexperienced, besides, he seems to me exactly like his father Antoine, ruined by women. There is but you, my father, who can be called, at the same time, brave as Cæsar and wise as Plato; so that I scarcely know what to do—keep you near me, as my adviser, or send you to the army, as its general. If you counsel me, who will command? If you command, who will counsel me?"

"Sire," said Coligny, "we must conquer first, and then take counsel after the victory."

"That is your advice—so be it; Monday you shall leave for Flanders, and I for Amboise."

"Your majesty leaves Paris, then?"

"Yes; I am weary of this confusion, and of these fetes. I am not a man of action; I am a dreamer. I was not born to be a king: I was born to be a poet. You shall form a council—as long as my mother has no influence there, all will go well. I have already sent word to Ronsard to meet me, and at this moment I must go and reply to a sonnet my dear and illustrious poet has sent me. I cannot, therefore, now give you the documents necessary to make you acquainted with the question now debating between Philip II. and myself. There is, besides, a plan of the campaign drawn up by my ministers. I will find it all for you, and give it to you to-morrow."

"At what o'clock, sire?"

"At ten o'clock; and if by chance I am busy making verses, or in my cabinet writing, well—you will find all the papers in this red morocco portfolio. The color is remarkable, and you cannot mistake it. I am now going to write to Ronsard."

"Adieu, sire!"

"Adieu, my father!"

"Your hand—"

"What, my hand? In my arms, in my heart, there is your place! Come, my old soldier, come!"

And Charles, drawing Coligny toward him as he inclined himself before him, pressed his lips to his forehead.

The admiral wiped a tear from his eyes as he left the room.

Charles followed him with his eyes as long as he could see, and listened as long as he could catch a sound; and when he could no longer hear or see anything, he turned and entered his small armory. This armory was the favorite apartment of the king. It was there he took his fencing lessons with Pompée, and his lessons of poetry with Ronsard. He had assembled there all the most costly arms he had been able to collect. The walls were hung with axes, shields, spears, halberds, pistols and muskets, and that day a famous armorer had brought him a magnificent arquebuse, on the barrel of which were incrusted, in silver, these four verses, composed by the royal poet himself:

"Pour maintenir la foy,
Je suis belle et fidèle,
Aux ennemis du Roi,
Je suis belle et cruelle."

Charles entered, as we have said, this room, and after having shut the door by which he had entered, he raised the tapestry that masked a passage leading into a little chamber, where a female, kneeling, was saying her prayers.

As this movement was executed noiselessly, and the footsteps of the king were deadened by the thick carpet, the female heard no sound, and continued to pray. Charles stood for a moment pensively looking at her.

She was a woman of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, whose masculine beauty was set off by the costume of the peasants of Caux. She wore the high cap so much the fashion at the court of France during the time of Isabel of Bavaria, and her bodice was red and embroidered with gold, like those of the *contadine* of Nettuno and Sora. The apartment which she had for nearly twenty years occupied was close to the bedchamber of the king, and presented a singular mixture of elegance and rusticity. The palace had encroached upon the cottage, and the cottage upon the palace, so that the chamber

was between the simplicity of the peasant and the luxury of the court lady.

The *prie-dieu* on which she knelt was of oak, beautifully carved, covered with velvet, and embroidered with gold, while the Bible (for she was of the Reformed religion), from which she was reading, was very old and torn, like those found in the poorest cottages.

"Eh, Madelon!" said the king.

The kneeling female lifted her head smilingly at the well-known voice, and rising from her knees—

"Ah! it is you, my son," said she.

"Yes, nurse; come here."

Charles IX. let fall the curtain and sat down on the arm of a large chair. The nurse appeared.

"What do you want with me, Charles?"

"Come near, and answer in a low tone."

The nurse approached him with familiarity.

"Here I am," said she; "speak!"

"Is the person I sent for there?"

"He has been there half an hour."

Charles rose from his seat, approached the window, looked to assure himself there were no eavesdroppers, went toward the door, and looked out there also, shook the dust from his trophies of arms, patted a large greyhound which followed him wherever he went, stopping when he stopped, and moving when he moved—then returning to his nurse:

"Let him come in, nurse," said he.

The nurse disappeared by the same passage by which she had entered, while the king went and leaned against a table on which were scattered arms of every kind. Scarcely had he done so, when the tapestry was again lifted and the person whom he expected entered.

He was a man of about forty, his large gray eyes full of treachery and falsehood, his nose curved like the beak of a screech-owl, his cheek-bones prominent. His face in vain sought to assume an expression of respect, but naught but fear appeared on his blanched lips.

Charles gently put his hand behind him, and grasped the butt of a pistol of a new construction, that was discharged, not by a match, as formerly, but by a flint brought in contact with a wheel of steel. He fixed his eyes steadily on the new comer, while he whistled, with the most perfect precision, one of his favorite hunting airs.

After a pause of some minutes, during which the expression of the stranger's visage grew more and more discomposed:

"You are the person," said the king, "called Francois de Louviers Maurevel?"

"Yes, sire."

"Captain of musqueteers?"

"Yes, sire."

"I wished to see you."

Maurevel inclined himself profoundly.

"You know," continued Charles, laying a stress on each word, "that I love all my subjects equally?"

"I know," stammered Maurevel, "that your majesty is the father of your people."

"And that the Huguenots and Catholics are equally my children?"

Maurevel remained silent, but his agitation was manifest to the piercing eyes of the king, although he was almost concealed in the obscurity.

"This displeases you," said the king, "who are so great an enemy to the Huguenots."

Maurevel fell on his knees.

"Sire," stammered he, "believe that—"

"I believe," continued Charles, whose eye now changed its glassy look for one that seemed of fire—"I believe that you had a great desire at Montcontour to kill the admiral, who has just left me; I believe you missed your aim, and that then you entered the army of my brother, the Duc d'Anjou; I believe that you enlisted into the company of M. de Mouy de St. Phale."

"Oh, sire!"

"A brave gentleman from Picardy."

"Sire, sire!" cried Maurevel, "do not overwhelm me."

"He was a brave soldier," continued Charles, whose features assumed an aspect of almost ferocious cruelty, "who received you as if you had been his son; fed you, lodged you, and clothed you."

Maurevel uttered a despairing sigh.

"You called him your father, and a tender friendship existed between you and the young De Mouy."

Maurevel, still on his knees, bent himself more and more; the king stood immovable, like a statue whose lips only are endowed with vitality.

"By the way," continued the king, "M. de Guise was to give you ten thousand crowns if you killed the admiral—was he not?" The assassin struck his forehead against the floor.

"One day that your father, the Sieur de Mouy, reconnoitered near Chevreux, he let his whip fall, and dismounted to pick it up. You were then alone with him; you took a pistol from your holster, and shot him in the back; then seeing he was dead—for you killed him on the spot—you escaped on the horse he had given you. This is your history, I believe?"

And as Maurevel remained mute under this accusation, every circumstance of which was true, the king began to whistle again, with the same precision and melody, the same hunting air.

"Now then, murderer!" said he, "do you know I have a great mind to hang you?"

"Oh, sire!" cried Maurevel.

"Young De Mouy entreated me to do so only yesterday, and I scarcely knew what answer to make him, for his demand was but just."

Maurevel clasped his hands.

"All the more just, since I am, as you say, the father of my people; and that, as I answered you now, I being reconciled to the Huguenots, they are as much my children as the Catholics."

"Sire," said Maurevel, in despair, "my life is in your hands; do with it what you will."

"You are quite right, and I would not give a halfpenny for it."

"But, sire," asked the assassin, "is there no means of redeeming my crime?"

"None, that I know of; only in your place—but thank God I am not—".

"Well, sire, were you in my place?" murmured Maurevel.

"I think I could extricate myself," said the king.

Maurevel raised himself on one knee and one hand, fixing his eyes upon Charles.

"I am very fond of young De Mouy," said the king; "but I am equally fond of my cousin of Guise; and if my cousin asked me to spare a man that the other wanted me to hang, I confess I should be embarrassed; but for policy as well as religion's sake I should comply with Guise's request; for De Mouy, although a brave gentleman, is but a petty personage compared with a prince of Lorraine."

During these words, Maurevel slowly rose, like a man whose life is saved.

"As in your situation it is very important to gain the duke's favor, listen to what he said to me last night."

Maurevel drew nearer.

"'Imagine, sire,' said he to me, 'that every morning, at ten o'clock, my deadliest enemy passes down the Rue Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, on his return from the Louvre. I see him from a barred window in the room of my old preceptor, the Canon Pierre Pile, and I pray the devil to open the earth and swallow him in its abysses.'—Now, Maurevel, perhaps if you were the devil, it would please the duke?"

"But, sire," stammered Maurevel, "I cannot make the earth open."

"You made it open, however, wide enough for De Mouy. It was with a pistol that—. Have you this famous pistol still?"

"I am a better marksman, sire, with an arquebus than a pistol," replied Maurevel, now quite reassured.

"Never mind," said the king; "I am sure M. de Guise will not care how it is done, so it be done."

"But," said Maurevel, "I must have a weapon I can rely on, as, perhaps, I shall have to fire from a long distance."

"I have ten arquebuses in this chamber," replied Charles IX., "with which I hit a crown-piece at a hundred and fifty paces—will you try one?"

"Most willingly, sire!" cried Maurevel, advancing toward the one that had been that day brought to the king.

"No; not that one," said the king; "I

reserve that for myself. Some day I will have a grand hunt, and then I hope to use it. Take any other you like."

Maurevel detached one from a trophy.

"And who is this enemy, sire?" asked he.

"How should I know?" replied Charles, with a contemptuous look.

"I must ask M. de Guise, then," faltered Maurevel.

The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not ask," said he; "for M. de Guise will not answer. People do not generally answer such questions; it is for those who do not wish to be hanged to guess."

"But how shall I know him?"

"I tell you he passes the canon's house every morning at ten o'clock."

"So many pass, would your majesty deign to give me any certain sign?"

"Oh, to-morrow he will carry a red morocco portfolio under his arm."

"That is sufficient, sire."

"You have still the horse M. de Mouy gave you, have you not?"

"Sire, I have a horse that is fleeter than any other in France."

"Oh, I am not in the least anxious about you; only it is as well to let you know there is a back-door."

"Thanks, sire; pray Heaven for me!"

"Oh, pray to the devil rather; for by his aid only can you escape a halter."

"Adieu, sire."

"Adieu! By the way, M. de Maurevel, remember, that if I hear of you before ten to-morrow, or do *not* hear of you afterward, there is an *oubliette* at the Louvre."

And Charles began to whistle, with more than usual precision, his favorite air.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENING OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

OUR readers have not forgotten that in the previous chapter Henry was anxiously expecting the arrival of a gentleman named De la Mole.

This young gentleman, as the admiral had anticipated, entered Paris by the gate of Saint Marcel, the evening of the 24th of August, 1572; and bestowing a contemptuous glance on the numerous hostelries that displayed their picturesque signs on either side of him, he rode on into the heart of the city, and after having crossed the Place Maubert, Le Petit-Pont, the Pont-Notre-Dame, and along the quays, he stopped at the end of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec.

The name pleased him, no doubt, for he entered the street, and finding on his left a large plate of iron swinging, creaking on its hinges, he stopped, and read these words, "La belle Etoile," written on a scroll beneath the sign, which was a most attractive one for a traveler, as it represented a fowl roasting in the midst of a black sky, while a man in a red cloak held out his hands and his purse toward it.

"Here," said the gentleman to himself, "is an inn that promises well, and the landlord must be a most ingenious fellow. I have always heard that the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec was near the Louvre; and provided that the interior answers to the exterior, I shall be admirably lodged."

While this monologue was going on, another person entered the other end of the street, and stopped also to admire the sign of La belle Etoile.

The gentleman whom we already know, at least, by name, rode a white horse, and wore a black doublet ornamented with jet; his cloak was of violet velvet, his boots were of black leather, and the hilts of his sword and dagger were of steel, beautifully worked; his age from twenty-four to twenty-five, his complexion dark, his eyes blue; a small mustache shaded a beautifully cut mouth, full of pearly teeth, that seemed, whenever he showed them, to light up his whole face with a smile of melancholy sweetness.

Nothing could form a greater contrast with him than the second traveler. Beneath his slouched hat appeared a profusion of hair, rather red than brown; large gray eyes that on the slightest occasion sparkled so fiercely, that they seemed black; a fair complexion, a light mustache, and splendid teeth, completed his description; and he was, with his white skin and fine form, what is generally

termed a handsome cavalier, and during the last hour, which he had employed in staring up at all the windows, the ladies had honored him with no small share of their attention.

He it was who first addressed the other gentleman, who was with himself looking at the sign of La belle Etoile.

"Mordi! monsieur," said he, with the accent that characterizes the natives of Piedmont—"we are close to the Louvre, are we not? At all events, I think your choice is the same as mine, and I am highly flattered by it."

"Monsieur," replied the other, with a provincial accent that rivaled that of his companion, "I believe this inn is near the Louvre, but I have not yet made up my mind to enter it."

"You are undecided; the house is tempting, nevertheless. You must allow the sign is very inviting."

"Very! and it is for that very reason I mistrust it, for Paris is full of sharpers, and you may be just as well tricked by a sign as by anything else."

"Mordi!" replied the Piedmontese, "I don't care a fig for their tricks; and if the host does not serve me a chicken as well roasted as the one on his sign, I will put him on the spit and roast him instead. Come, let us go in."

"You have decided me," said the Provencal, laughing; "precede me, I beg."

"Impossible, monsieur—I could not think of it; for I am only your most obedient servant, the Count Annibal de Coconnas."

"And I, monsieur, but the Count Joseph Boniface de Lerac de la Mole, equally at your service."

"Since that is the case, let us take each other's arm, and go in so."

The result of this proposition was, that the two young men got off their horses, threw the bridles to the hostler, linked arms, adjusted their swords, and advanced toward the door of the inn, where stood mine host, who did not seem to notice them, so busy was he talking with a tall man, wrapped in a large sad-colored cloak like an owl buried in her feathers.

The two gentlemen were so near the host and his friend in the sad-colored cloak, that Coconnas, impatient at being thus neglected, touched his sleeve.

He appeared suddenly to perceive them, and dismissed his friend with an "Au revoir! be sure and let me know the hour appointed."

"Well, monsieur le drole," said Coconnas, "do not you see we have business with you?"

"I beg pardon, gentlemen," said the host; "I did not see you."

"Eh, mordi! then you ought to have seen us; and now that you do see us, say 'M. le Comte,' and not merely 'monsieur.'"

La Mole stood by, leaving Coconnas, who seemed to have undertaken the affair, to speak; but it was plain, from the expression of his face, that he was fully prepared to act upon occasion.

"Well, what is your pleasure, M. le Comte?" asked the landlord, in a quiet tone.

"Ah, that's better; is it not?" said Coconnas, turning to La Mole, who inclined his head affirmatively. "Monsieur le Comte and myself wish to sup and sleep here to-night."

"Gentlemen," said the host, "I am very sorry, but I have only one chamber, and I am afraid that would not suit you."

"So much the better," said La Mole; "we will go and lodge somewhere else."

"I shall stay here," said Coconnas; "my horse is tired. I will have the room, since you will not."

"Ah! that is quite different," replied the host, coolly. "I cannot lodge you at all, then."

"Mordi!" cried Coconnas, "here's a pretty fellow! Just now you could not lodge us because we were two, and now you have not room for one. You will not lodge us at all, then?"

"Since you take this high tone, gentlemen, I will answer you frankly."

"Answer, then; only answer quickly."

"Well, then, I would rather not have the honor of lodging you at all."

"For what reason?" asked Coconnas, growing white with rage.

"Because you have no servants, and

for one master's room full, I should have two servants' rooms empty; so that, if I let you have the master's room, I run the risk of not letting the others."

"M. de la Mole," said Coconnas, "do you not think we ought to thrash this fellow?"

"Decidedly," said La Mole, preparing himself, together with Coconnas, to lay his whip over the host's back.

But the landlord, despite this demonstration, contented himself with retreating a step or two.

"It is easy to see," said he, in a tone of raillery, "that these gentlemen are from the provinces. At Paris, it is no longer the fashion to kill innkeepers—only great men are killed nowadays; and if you make any disturbance, I will call my neighbors, and instead of you beating *me*, *you* shall be beaten yourselves."

"Mordi!" cried Coconnas, in a rage; "he is laughing at us."

"Gregoire, my arquebuse," said the host, with the same voice with which he would have said, "Give these gentlemen a chair."

"*Trippe del papa!*" cried Coconnas, drawing his sword; "rouse yourself, M. de la Mole."

"No, no; for while we rouse ourselves, our supper will get cold."

"What, you think—" cried Coconnas.

"That M. de la Belle Etoile is right; only he does not know how to treat his guests, especially when they are gentlemen; for instead of saying, 'Gentlemen, I do not want you,' he should have said, 'Enter, gentlemen'—at the same time reserving to himself the right to charge in his bill—Master's room, so much; servant's, so much."—With these words, La Mole pushed the host, who was looking for his arquebuse, on one side, and entered with Coconnas.

"Well," said Coconnas, "I am sorry to sheathe my sword before I have ascertained that it is as sharp as that rascal's larding-needle."

"Patience, my dear friend," said La Mole. "All the inns in Paris are full of gentlemen come to attend the king of Navarre's marriage, and we shall have great difficulty in finding another apartment; besides, perhaps it is the custom to receive strangers at Paris in this manner."

"Mordi! how quiet you are, M. de la Mole!" muttered Coconnas, curling his red mustache with rage. "But let the scoundrel take care; for if his meat be not excellent, if his bed be hard, his wine less than three years in bottle, and his waiter be not as pliant as a reed—"

"Ah, ah!" said the landlord, whetting his knife on a strap, "you may make yourself easy; you are in a land of plenty."

Then, in a low tone, he added—"These are some Huguenots; they have grown so insolent since the marriage of their Béarnais with Mademoiselle Marguerite!" Then, with a smile that would have made his guests shudder had they seen it:

"How strange it would be if I were just to have two Huguenots come to my house, when—"

"Now, then," interrupted Coconnas, "are we going to have any supper?"

"Yes, as soon as you please, monsieur," returned the host, softened, no doubt, by the last reflection.

"Well, then, the sooner the better," said Coconnas; and turning to La Mole:

"Pray, M. le Comte, while our room is being prepared, tell me, do you think Paris seems a gay city?"

"Ma foi! no," said La Mole. "All the Parisians I saw had most forbidding faces; perhaps they are afraid of the storm; for the sky looks very black, and the air feels heavy."

"Are you not looking for the Louvre, count?"

"Yes! and you also, Monsieur de Coconnas."

"Well, let us look for it together."

"It is rather late to go out, is it not?" said La Mole.

"Early or late, I must go out: my orders are peremptory—'Come instantly to Paris, and communicate with the Duke de Guise without delay.'"

At the name of the Duke de Guise, the landlord drew nearer.

"I think the rascal is listening to us," said Coconnas, who could not forgive the host his rude reception of them.

"I am listening, gentlemen," replied he, taking off his cap; "but it is to serve you. I heard the great duke's name mentioned, and I came immediately. What can I do for you?"

"Ah! this name is magical, since it renders you so polite. Tell me, master—what's your name?"

"La Huriere," replied the host, bowing.

"Well, Master la Huriere, do you think my arm is lighter than the Duc de Guise's, who makes you so civil?"

"No, M. le Comte; but it is not so long: besides, I must tell you, that the great Henry is the idol of the Parisians."

"What Henry?" asked La Mole.

"There is only one."

"Which?"

"Henry de Guise!"

"You are mistaken; there is another, whom I desire you do not speak ill of, and that is Henry of Navarre, besides Henry de Conde, who has his share of merit."

"I do not know them," said the landlord.

"But I do; and as I am directed to the king of Navarre, I desire you not to speak slightingly of him before me."

The host only replied by touching his cap, and continued speaking to Coconnas:

"Monsieur is going to see the great Duke de Guise. Monsieur is very fortunate. He is come, no doubt, for—"

"What?" asked Coconnas.

"For the fete," replied the host, with a singular smile.

"For all the fetes," replied Coconnas; "for Paris is, I hear, a succession of fetes. Does not every one find plenty of amusement?"

"Pretty well; but they will have more soon, I hope."

"The marriage of the king of Navarre has brought a great many people to Paris, has it not?" said La Mole.

"A great many Huguenots—yes," replied La Huriere, but suddenly changing his tone:

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said he; "perhaps you are of that religion?"

"I," cried Coconnas, "I am as good a Catholic as the pope himself."

La Huriére looked at La Mole, but La Mole did not, or would not, comprehend him.

"If you do not know the king of Navarre," said La Mole, "perhaps you know the admiral. I have heard he has some influence at court, and as I have letters for him, perhaps you will so far sully your mouth as to tell me where he lives?"

"He *did* live in the Rue de Bethisy," replied the host, with a satisfaction he could not conceal.

"He *did* live?" said La Mole. "He has left, then?"

"Yes—this world, perhaps."

"What!" cried both the gentlemen together, "the admiral dead?"

"What, M. de Coconnas, are you a friend of the Duke de Guise, and not know *that?*"——"Know what?"

"That the day before yesterday the admiral was passing before the house of the Canon Pierre Piles, when he was fired at—"

"And killed?" said La Mole.

"No; he had his arm broken, and two fingers taken off; but it is hoped the balls were poisoned."

"How, wretch!" cried La Mole; "hoped?"

"Believed, I mean," said the host, winking at Coconnas; "it was a slip of the tongue."

"Really!" said Coconnas, joyfully.

"Really!" said La Mole, sorrowfully.

"It is just as I tell you, gentlemen," said the host.

"In that case," said La Mole, "I must go instantly to the Louvre. Shall I find the king of Navarre there?"

"Most likely, since he lives there."

"And I," said Coconnas, "must also go to the Louvre. Shall I find the Duke de Guise there?"

"Most likely; for he has this instant passed with two hundred gentlemen."

"Come, then, M. de Coconnas," said La Mole.

"I am ready," returned he.

"But your supper, gentlemen!" cried La Huriere.

"Ah," said La Mole, "I shall most likely sup with the king of Navarre."

"And I," said Coconnas, "with the Duke de Guise."

"And I," said the host, after having watched the two gentlemen take the road to the Louvre, "I will go and burnish my steel cap, put a match to my arquebuse, and sharpen my partisan, for no one knows what may happen?"

CHAPTER V.

OF THE LOUVRE IN PARTICULAR, AND OF VIRTUE IN GENERAL.

THE two young men, directed by the first person they met, went down the Rue d'Averon, the Rue St.-Germain-l'Auxerrois, and soon found themselves before the Louvre, whose towers were beginning to be lost in the darkness of the night.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Coconnas of La Mole, who stopped before the old chateau, and gazed, not without awe, on the drawbridges, the narrow windows, and the pointed belfries, presented to him.

"I scarcely know," said La Mole; "my heart beats strangely. I am not timid, but this old palace seems so gloomy and terrible."

"For my part," replied Coconnas. "I feel in excellent spirits. My dress is rather disordered," continued he, "but never mind; it will prove I have obeyed my instructions, and come promptly on my arrival."

The two young men continued their way, each influenced by the feelings he had expressed.

The Louvre was guarded with more than usual care, and all the sentinels were doubled. Our cavaliers were somewhat embarrassed, therefore, but Coconnas, who had remarked that the Duke de Guise's name acted like a talisman on the Parisians, approached the sentinel, and making use of the duke's name, demanded to enter. The name seemed to produce its ordinary effect upon the soldier, who, however, asked Coconnas if he had the countersign.

Coconnas was forced to confess he had not.

"Stand back, then," said the soldier.

At this moment, a person who was talking with the officer of the guard when Coconnas demanded leave to enter, advanced to him.

"What do you want with M. de Guise?" asked he, with a strong German accent.

"I wish to see him," said Coconnas.

"Impossible—the duke is with the king."

"But I have a letter for him."

"Ah, that is different. What is your name?"

"The Count Annibal de Coconnas."

"Will Monsieur Annibal give me the letter?"

"On my word," said La Mole to himself, "I hope I may find another gentleman, equally polite, to conduct me to the king of Navarre."

"Give me the letter," said the German gentleman, holding out his hand toward Coconnas.

"Mordi!" replied the Piedmontese, "I scarcely know whether I ought, as I have not the honor of knowing you."

"It is Monsieur de Besme," said the sentinel, "you may safely give him your letter, I'll answer for it."

"M. de Besme!" cried Coconnas; "with the greatest pleasure. Here is the letter. Pardon my hesitation; but when one is intrusted with an important commission, one ought to be careful."

"There is no need of any excuse," said De Besme.

"Perhaps, sir," said La Mole, "you will be so kind as to do the same for my letter that you have done for that of my friend?"

"Who are you, monsieur?"

"The Count Lerac de la Mole."

"I don't know the name."

"No doubt; for I am only just arrived in Paris, for the first time."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Provence."

"With a letter also?"

"Yes."

"For the Duke de Guise?"

"No; for the king of Navarre."

"I am not in the service of the king of Navarre," said De Besme, coldly, "and therefore I cannot take your letter."

And turning on his heel, he entered the Louvre, bidding Coconnas follow him.

La Mole was left alone.

At this moment a troop of cavaliers, about a hundred in number, came out from the Louvre.

"Ah, ah!" said the sentinel to his comrade, "here come De Mouy and his Huguenots! See how joyous they all are. The king has promised them, no doubt, to put to death the assassin of the admiral; and as it was he who murdered De Mouy's father, the son will kill two birds with one stone."

"Did you not say," interrupted La Mole, "that this officer is M. de Mouy?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Thank you," said La Mole, "that was all I wished to know;" and advancing to the chief of the cavaliers:

"Sir," said he, "I am told you are M. de Mouy."

"Yes, sir," returned the officer, courteously. "May I inquire whom I have the honor of addressing?"

"The Count Lerac de la Mole."

The young men bowed to each other.

"What can I do for you, monsieur?" asked De Mouy.

"Monsieur, I am just arrived from Aix, and I have a letter from M. d'Aunac, governor of Provence, for the king of Navarre. How can I give it to him? How can I enter the Louvre?"

"Nothing is easier than to enter the Louvre," replied De Mouy; "but I fear the king will be unable to see you at this hour. I will, however, if you please, conduct you to his apartments, and then you must manage for yourself."

"A thousand thanks!"

"Come, then," said De Mouy.

De Mouy dismounted, advanced toward the wicket, passed the sentinel, conducted La Mole into the chateau, and, opening the door leading to the king's apartments:

"Enter, and inquire for yourself, monsieur," said he.

And saluting La Mole, he retired.

La Mole, left alone, looked round. The anteroom was vacant. He advanced a few paces and found himself in a passage.

"I will walk straight on," thought he, "and I must meet some one."

Suddenly the door opposite that by which he had entered opened, and two pages appeared, lighting a lady of noble bearing and exquisite beauty.

The glare of the torches fell full on La Mole, who stood motionless.

The lady stopped also.

"What do you want, sir?" said she, in a voice of exquisite sweetness.

"Oh, madame," said La Mole, "pardon me; I have just left M. de Mouy, who was so good as to conduct me here, and I wish to see the king of Navarre."

"The king is not here, sir; he is with his brother-in-law. But, in his absence, could you not say to the queen—"

"Oh, yes, madame," returned La Mole, "if I could obtain audience of her."

"You have it already, sir."

"What!" cried La Mole.

"I am the queen of Navarre."

La Mole started with surprise.

"Speak, sir," said Marguerite, "but speak quickly, for the queen-mother is waiting for me."

"If the queen-mother waits for you, madame," said La Mole, "suffer me to leave you, for I am incapable of collecting my ideas, or of thinking of aught but admiration."

Marguerite advanced graciously toward the handsome young man, who, without knowing it, acted like a finished courtier.

"Recover yourself, sir," said she; "I will wait."

"Pardon me, madame," said La Mole, "that I did not salute you with the respect due to you, but—"

"You took me for one of my ladies?" said Marguerite, smiling.

"No; but for the shade of the beautiful Diana of Poictiers, who is said to haunt the Louvre."

"Come, sir," said Marguerite, "I see you will make your fortune at court; your letter was not needed, but still, give it me: I will take care the king of Navarre has it."

In an instant La Mole threw open his doublet, and drew from his breast a letter

enveloped in silk. Marguerite took the letter, and glanced at the writing.

"Are you not M. de la Mole?" asked she.

"Yes, madame. Can I hope my name is not unknown to you?"

"I have heard my husband, and the Duc d'Alencon, my brother, speak of you. I know they expect you."

And she placed the letter in her corsage, glittering with gold and diamonds.

"Now, sir," said she, "descend to the gallery below, and wait until some one comes to you from the king of Navarre. One of my pages will show you the way."

And Marguerite disappeared, like a dream.

"Are you coming, sir?" cried the page who was to conduct La Mole to the lower gallery.

"Oh, yes—yes!" cried La Mole, joyfully; for, as the page led him the same way that Marguerite had gone by, he hoped to see her again.

As he descended the staircase, he perceived her below; and whether she heard his step, or by chance, she looked round, and La Mole saw her features a second time.

The page preceding La Mole descended a story lower, opened one door, then another, and stopping—"It is here you are to wait," said he.

La Mole entered the gallery, the door of which closed after him.

The gallery was vacant with the exception of one gentleman, who was sauntering up and down, and seemed also waiting for some one.

It was so dark that, though not twenty paces apart, it was impossible for either to recognize the other's face.

La Mole drew nearer.

"By Heaven!" muttered he—"here is M. de Coconnas again!"

At the sound of footsteps, Coconnas turned, and recognized La Mole.

"Mordi!" cried he. "The devil take me, but here is M. de la Mole! What am I doing? Swearing in the king's palace. Well, never mind; the king does not much care where he swears.—Here we are at last, then, in the Louvre!"

"Yes: I suppose M. de Besme introduced you?"

"Oh, he is the most polite German I ever met with. Who brought you in?"

"M. de Mouy. I told you the Huguenots had some interest at court. Have you seen M. de Guise?"

"No—not yet. Have you obtained an audience of the king of Navarre?"

"No—but I soon shall. I was conducted here, and told to wait."

"Ah, you will see we shall be invited to some grand supper, and placed side by side. How singular! We seem inseparable. By the way, are you hungry?"

"No."

"And yet you seemed anxious to taste the good cheer of La belle Etoile."

At this moment the door communicating with the king's apartment opened, and M. de Besme entered.

He scrutinized both gentlemen, and then motioned Coconnas to follow him.

Coconnas waved his hand to La Mole.

De Besme traversed a gallery, opened a door, and stood at the head of a staircase.

He looked cautiously round, and,

"M. de Coconnas," said he, "where are you staying?"

"At the Belle Etoile, Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"Ah, that is close by. Return to your hotel, and to-night—"

"Well, to-night?"

"Come here, with a white cross in your hat. The password is 'Guise.' Hush! not a word."

"What time am I to come?"

"When you hear the tocsin."

"Good—I shall be here," said Coconnas.

And, saluting De Besme, he betook himself to the hostelry of La belle Etoile.

At this instant the door of the king of Navarre's apartment opened, and a page appeared.

"You are the Count de la Mole?" said he.

"That is my name."

"Where do you lodge?"

"At the Belle Etoile."

"That is close to the Louvre. His

majesty the king of Navarre has desired me to inform you that he cannot at present receive you: perhaps he may send for you to-night; but, at all events, come to the Louvre to-morrow."

"But the sentinel will refuse me admission."

"True: the countersign is 'Navarre;' that will secure your entrance."

"Thanks."

The first thing La Mole saw on entering the inn was Coconnas seated before a large omelette.

"Oh, oh!" cried Coconnas, laughing, "I see you have no more dined with the king of Navarre than I have supped with the Duke de Guise."

"Ma foi! no."

"Are you hungry now?"

"Yes, very."

"Well, then, sit down, and partake of my omelette."

"I see that fate makes us inseparable. Do you sleep here?"

"I don't know."

"More do I."

"Well, then, I know where I shall pass the night."

"Where?"

"Wherever you do; that is inevitable."

Thus saying, the two gentlemen fell to work on the omelette of Maitre la Huriere.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEBT PAID.

Now, if the reader is curious to know why M. de la Mole had not been received by the king of Navarre, why M. de Coconnas had not seen M. de Guise, and why both, instead of supping at the Louvre, on pheasants, partridges, and kid, supped at the hotel of the Belle Etoile on an omelette, he must kindly accompany us to the old palace of kings, and follow the queen, Marguerite of Navarre, of whom La Mole had lost sight at the entrance of the grand gallery.

While Marguerite was descending this staircase, the duke, Henry de Guise, whom she had not seen since the night of her marriage, was in the king's closet. To this staircase, which Marguerite was descending, there was an outlet. To the closet in which M. de Guise was, there was a door, and this door and this outlet both led to a corridor, which corridor led to the apartments of the queen-mother, Catherine de Medicis.

Catherine de Medicis was alone, seated near a table, with her elbow leaning on a Prayer-book half open, and her head leaning on a hand still remarkably beautiful —thanks to the cosmetics with which she was supplied by the Florentine, Rene, who united the double duty of perfumer and poisoner to the queen-mother.

The widow of Henry II. was clothed in mourning, which she had not thrown off since her husband's death. At this period she was about fifty-two or fifty-three years of age, and preserved a figure full of freshness and still of considerable beauty. Her apartment, like her costume, was all mourning. By her side was a small Italian greyhound, called Phœbe, a present from her son-in-law, Henry of Navarre.

Suddenly, and at a moment when the queen-mother appeared plunged in some thought which brought a smile to her lips, colored with carmine, a man opened the door, raised the tapestry, and showed his pale visage, saying, "All goes badly."

Catherine raised her head, and recognized the Duke de Guise.

"How 'all goes badly'?" she replied. "What mean you, Henry?"

"I mean that the king is more than ever taken with the accursed Huguenots: and if we await his leave to execute the great enterprise, we shall wait a very long time, and perhaps forever."

"What, then, has happened?" inquired Catherine, still preserving the tranquillity of countenance that was habitual to her, and yet to which, when occasion served, she could give so different an expression.

"Why, just now, for the twentieth time, I opened the conversation with his majesty as to whether he would still permit all those bravadoes which the gentlemen of the Reformed religion indulge in, since the wound of their admiral."

"And what did my son reply?" asked Catherine.

"He replied, 'Monsieur le Duc, you must necessarily be suspected by the people as the author of the attempted assassination of my second father, the admiral; defend yourself from the imputation as best you may. As to me, I will defend myself properly, if I am insulted;' and then he turned away to feed his dogs."

"And you made no attempt to retain him!"

"Yes; but he replied to me in that tone which you so well know, and looking at me with the gaze peculiar to him, 'M. le Duc, my dogs are hungry; and they are not men, whom I can keep waiting.' Whereupon I came straight to you."

"And you have done right," said the queen-mother.

"But what is now to be done?"

"Try a last effort."

"And who will try it?"

"I! Is the king alone?"

"No; M. de Tavannes is with him."

"Await me here; or, rather, follow me at a distance."

Catherine rose and went to the chamber, where, on Turkey carpets and velvet cushions, were the favorite greyhounds of the king. On perches ranged along the wall were two or three favorite falcons and a small pied hawk, with which Charles IX. amused himself in bringing down the small birds in the garden of the old Louvre, and that of the Tuileries, which they had just commenced building.

On her way the queen-mother arranged her countenance into a pale and agonizing look, down which rolled a last—or rather a first tear.

She approached Charles IX. noiselessly, as he was giving his dogs fragments of cakes cut into equal portions.

"My son," said the queen, with such a tremulous voice, so adroitly managed, that the king started.

"What would you, madame!" said Charles, turning round suddenly.

"I would, my son," replied Catherine, "request your leave to retire to one of your chateaux, no matter which, so that it be as distant as possible from Paris."

"And wherefore, madame?" inquired Charles IX., fixing on his mother that glassy eye, which, on certain occasions, became so penetrating.

"Because every day I receive new insults from persons of the new faith; because to-day I hear that you have been freshly menaced by the Protestants, even in your own Louvre, and I do not desire te be present at such spectacles."

"But, then, madame," replied Charles IX., with an expression full of conviction, "they have attempted to kill their admiral. An infamous murderer has already assassinated the brave M. de Mouy. Mort de ma vie! mother, there must be justice in a kingdom!"

"Oh, be easy on that head, my son," said Catherine; "justice will not be wanting to them; for if you should refuse it, they will still have it in their own way: on M. de Guise to-day, on me to-morrow, and yourself hereafter."

"Oh, madame!" said Charles, allowing a first accent of doubt to break through, "do you think so?"

"Oh, my son," replied Catherine, giving way entirely to the violence of her thoughts, "do you not see that it is no longer a question of the death of Francois de Guise or the admiral, of Protestant religion or Catholic, but simply of the substitution of the son of Antoine de Bourbon for the son of Henry the Second?"

"Come, come, mother, you are falling again into your usual exaggeration," said the king.

"What is, then, your opinion, my son?"

"To wait, mother—to wait. All human wisdom is in this single word. The greatest, the strongest, the most skillful, is he who knows how to wait."

"Do you wait, then: I will not."

And on this Catherine made a curtsey, and, advancing toward the door, was about to return to her apartment.

Charles IX. stopped her.

"Well, then, really, what is best to be done, mother?" he asked, "for I am just before everything, and I would have every one satisfied with me."

Catherine turned toward him.

"Come, count," she said to Tavannes, who was caressing the pied hawk, "and

tell the king your opinion as to what should be done."

"Will your majesty permit me?" inquired the count.

"Speak, Tavannes!—speak."

"What does your majesty do when in the chase the wounded boar turns on you?"

"Mordieu, sir, I await him, with firm foot and hand," replied Charles, "and stab him in the throat with my good sword."

"Simply, that he may not hurt you," remarked Catherine.

"And to amuse myself," said the king, with a smile which indicated courage pushed even to ferocity; "but I will not amuse myself with killing my subjects; for, after all, the Huguenots are my subjects as well as the Catholics."

"Then, sire," said Catherine, "your subjects, the Huguenots, will do like the wild boar who escapes the sword thrust at his throat: they will bring down the throne."

"Bah! Do you really think so, madame?" said Charles IX., with an air which denoted that he did not place great faith in his mother's predictions.

"But have you not seen M. de Mouy and his party to-day?"

"Yes; I have seen them, and indeed just left them. But what does he ask for that is not just? He has requested the death of the murderer of his father and the assassin of the admiral. Did we not punish M. de Montgomery for the death of my father and your husband, although that death was a simple accident?"

"'Tis well, sire," said Catherine, piqued; "let us say no more. Your majesty is under the protection of that God who gives strength, wisdom and confidence. But I, a poor woman, whom God abandons, no doubt, on account of my sins, fear, and give way." And Catherine again curtseyed and left the room, making a sign to the Duke de Guise, who had at that moment entered, to remain in her place, and try a last effort.

Charles IX. followed his mother with his eye, but this time did not recall her. He then began to caress his dogs, whistling a hunting air.

He suddenly paused.

"My mother," said he, "is a right royal spirit, and doubts of nothing. Really now, it is a cool proposal, to kill off some dozens of Huguenots, because they come to demand justice, as if it were not their right!"

"Some dozens!" murmured the Duke de Guise.

"Ah! are you there, sir?" said the king, appearing to see him for the first time. "Yes, some dozens. A tolerable waste of life! Ah! if any one came to me and said: 'Sire, you shall be rid of all your enemies at once, and to-morrow there shall not remain one to reproach you with the death of the others,' why, then, I do not say—"

"Well, sire!"

"Tavannes," said the king, "you will tire Margot; put her back on her perch. It is no reason, because she bears the name of my sister, the queen of Navarre, that all the world should caress her."

Tavannes put the hawk on her perch, and amused himself by playing with a greyhound's ears.

"But, sire, if any one should say to your majesty: 'Sire, your majesty shall be delivered from all your enemies to-morrow'?"

"And by the intercession of what saint would this great miracle be effected?"

"Sire, we are to-day at the 24th of August, and it will therefore be by the interposition of Saint Bartholomew."

"A worthy saint," replied the king, "who allowed himself to be skinned alive!"

"So much the better; the more he suffered, the more he ought to have felt a desire for vengeance on his executioners."

"And is it you, my cousin," said the king, "is it you, with your pretty little gold-hilted sword, who will to-morrow slay ten thousand Huguenots? Ah, ah! mort de ma vie! you are very amusing, M. de Guise!" And the king burst into loud laughter, but a laughter so forced that the room echoed with its sinister sound.

"Sire, one word—and one only," continued the duke, shuddering in spite of

himself at the sound of this laugh, which had nothing human in it—"one sign, and all is ready. I have the Swiss and eleven ındred gentlemen; I have the light ɔrse and the citizens on my side; your ıajesty has your guards; your friends, he Catholic nobility. We are twenty to one."

"Well, then, cousin of mine, since you are so strong, why the devil do you come to fill my ears with all this! Act without me—act—"

And the king turned again to his dogs.

Then the tapestry suddenly moved aside, and Catherine reappeared.

"All goes well," she said to the duke; "urge him and he will yield."

And the tapestry fell on Catherine, without the king seeing, or at least appearing to see her.

"But yet," continued De Guise, "it is necessary I should know, if, in acting as I desire, I shall act agreeably to your majesty's views."

"Really, cousin Henry, you put your knife to my throat! But I shall resist. Mordieu! am I not the king?"

"No, not yet, sire; but, if you will, you shall be so to-morrow."

"Ah—what!" continued Charles, "you would kill the king of Navarre, the Prince de Conde, in my Louvre—ah!" Then he added, in a voice scarcely audible—"Without the walls, I do not say—"

"Sire," cried the duke, "they are going out this evening, to join in a revel with your brother, the Duke d'Alencon."

"Tavannes," said the king, with well-affected impatience, "do not you see that you annoy Actæon? Here, boy—here!"

And Charles IX. quitted the apartment, ithout waiting to hear more, and leav-ıg Tavannes and the Duke de Guise almost as uncertain as before.

Another scene was passing in Catherine's apartments, who, after she had given the Duke de Guise her counsel to remain firm, had returned to her rooms, where she found assembled the persons who usually assisted at her going to bed.

Her face was now as full of joy as it had been downcast when she set out. One by one she dismissed her women, and there only remained Madame Marguerite, who, seated on a coffer near the open window, was looking at the sky, absorbed in thought.

Two or three times, when she thus found herself alone with her daughter, the queen-mother opened her mouth to speak, but each time a gloomy thought withheld the words ready to escape her lips.

Suddenly the tapestry moved, and Henry of Navarre appeared.

The little greyhound, which was asleep on a sofa, leaped toward him at a bound.

"You here, my son!" said Catherine, starting. "Do you sup in the Louvre to-night?"

"No, madame," replied Henry, "we are going into the city to-night, with Messieurs d'Alencon and de Conde. I almost expected to find them here."

Catherine smiled.

"Ah! you men are so happy to have such liberty! Are they not, dear daughter?"

"Yes," replied Marguerite, "liberty is so glorious, so sweet a thing."

"Would you imply that I restricted you, madame?" inquired Henry, bowing to his wife.

"No, sir; it is not for myself that I complain, but for women in general."

"Who goes there?" asked Catherine, suddenly, and at the same moment the tapestry was raised and Madame de Sauve showed her lovely head.

"Madame," she said, "it is Rene, the perfumer, whom your majesty sent for."

Catherine cast a glance as quick as lightning at Henry of Navarre. The young prince turned slightly red, and then fearfully pale. The name of his mother's assassin had been mentioned in his presence; he felt that his face betrayed his emotion, and he leaned against the bar of the window.

The little greyhound growled.

At the same moment, two persons entered; the one announced, and the other having no need to be so.

The first was Rene, the perfumer, who approached Catherine with all the servile obsequiousness of Florentine servants.

He held in his hand a box, which he opened, and all the compartments were seen filled with powders and flasks.

The second was Madame de Lorraine, the eldest sister of Marguerite. She entered by a small private door, which led from the king's closet, and, all pale and trembling, and hoping not to be observed by Catherine, who was examining, with Madame de Sauve, the contents of the box brought by Rene, seated herself beside Marguerite, near whom the king of Navarre was standing, with his hand on his brow, like one who tries to rouse himself from some sudden shock.

At this instant Catherine turned round.

"Daughter," she said to Marguerite, "you may retire to your chamber. My son, you may go and recreate yourself in the city."

Marguerite rose, and Henry turned half round.

Madame de Lorraine seized Marguerite's hand.

"Sister," she whispered, with great quickness, "in the name of the Duke de Guise, who now saves you, as you saved him, do not go hence—do not go to your apartments."

"Eh! what say you, Claude?" inquired Catherine, turning round.

"Nothing, mother."

"What did you whisper to Marguerite?"

"Only a message from the Duchesse de Nevers."

"And where is the lovely duchesse?"

"With her brother-in-law, M. de Guise."

Catherine looked suspiciously at her two daughters, and frowned.

"Come here, Claude," said the queen-mother.

Claude obeyed, and the queen seized her hand.

"What have you said to her, indiscreet girl that you are?" she murmured, squeezing her daughter's wrist until she nearly shrieked with pain.

"Madame," said Henry to his wife, he having lost nothing of the movements of the queen, Claude, or Marguerite—"Madame, will you allow me the honor of kissing your hand?"

Marguerite extended her trembling hand.

"What did she say to you?" murmured Henry, as he stooped to imprint a kiss on her hand.

"Not to go out. In the name of Heaven, therefore, do not you go out either!"

This was but a slight gleam; but by its light, rapid as it was, Henry at once saw through the whole plot.

"This is not all," added Marguerite: "here is a letter, which a country gentleman brought."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," he said, taking the letter, and putting it under his doublet; and passing in front of his bewildered wife, he placed his hand on the shoulder of the Florentine.

"Well, Master Rene!" he said, "and how goes on business?"

"Pretty well, monseigneur — pretty well," replied the poisoner, with his perfidious smile.

"I should think so," said Henry, "with men who, like you, supply all the crowned heads at home and abroad."

"Except the king of Navarre," replied the Florentine, impudently.

"Ventre-saint-gris, Master Rene," replied the king, "you are right; and yet my poor mother, who also bought of you, recommended you to me with her dying breath. Come to me to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, and bring your best perfumes."

At this moment the Duchess of Lorraine, who could no longer contain herself, burst into loud sobs.

Henry did not even turn toward her.

"Sister, dear, what is the matter?" cried Marguerite, going toward her.

"Nothing," said Catherine, passing between the two young women—"nothing; she has those nervous attacks, for which Mazille prescribed aromatic preparations;" and again, and with more force than before, she pressed her eldest daughter's arm; then, turning toward the youngest:

"Why, Margot," she said, "did you

hear me request you to retire to your room? if that is not sufficient, I command you."

"Excuse me, madame," replied Marguerite, trembling and pale; "I wish your majesty good-night."

"I hope your wishes may be heard. Good-night—good-night!"

Marguerite withdrew, staggering with affright, and in vain seeking a glance from her husband, who did not even turn toward her.

There was a moment's silence, during which Catherine remained with her eyes fastened on the Duchess of Lorraine, who, on her side, without speaking, looked at her mother with clasped hands.

Henry's back was still turned, but he was watching the scene in a glass, while seeming to curl his mustache with a pomade which Rene had given to him.

"And you, Henry, do you mean to go?" asked Catherine.

"Yes, that's true," exclaimed the king. "Ma foi! I forgot that the Duke d'Alencon and the Prince de Conde were awaiting me! These are admirable perfumes; they quite overpower one, and destroy one's memory. Good-evening, madame."

"Good-evening! To-morrow you will perhaps bring me tidings of the admiral."

"Without fail.—Well, Phœbe, what is it?"

"Phœbe!" said the queen-mother, impatiently.

"Call her, madame," said the Béarnais, "for she will not allow me to go out."

The queen-mother rose, took the little greyhound by the collar, and held her while Henry left the apartment, with his features as calm and smiling as if he did not feel in his heart that his life was in imminent peril.

Behind him the little dog, set free by Catherine de Medicis, rushed to try and overtake him, but the door was closed, and Phœbe could only put her long nose under the tapestry and give a long and mournful howl.

"Now, Charlotte," said Catherine to Madame de Sauve, "go and find M. de Guise and Tavannes, who are in my oratory, and return with them, and remain with the Duchess of Lorraine, who has the vapors."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NIGHT OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

WHEN La Mole and Coconnas had finished their meager supper, Coconnas stretched his legs, leaned one elbow on the table, and drinking a last glass of wine, said:

"Do you mean to go to bed instantly, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Ma foi! I am very much inclined, for it is possible that I may be called up in the night."

"And I, too," said Coconnas; "but it appears to me that, under the circumstances, instead of going to bed and making those wait who are to come to us, we should do better to call for cards and play a game. They will then find us quite ready."

"I would willingly accept your proposal, sir, but I have little money for play. I have scarce a hundred gold crowns in my valise, for my whole treasure."

"A hundred gold crowns!" cried Coconnas, "and you complain? Mordi! I have but six!"

"Why," replied La Mole, "I saw you draw from your pocket a purse which appeared not only full, but I should say, brimful."

"Ah," said Coconnas, "that is to defray an old debt which I am compelled to pay to an old friend of my father, whom I suspect to be, like yourself, somewhat of a Huguenot. Yes, there are here a hundred rose nobles," he added, slapping his pocket, "but these hundred rose nobles belong to a Master Mercandon. As to my personal patrimony, that, as I tell you, is limited to six crowns."

"How, then, can you play?"

"Why, it is because of that I wish to play. Besides, an idea occurs to me."

"What is it?"

"We both came to Paris on the same errand."——"Yes."

"We have each sought a powerful protector."——"Yes."

"You rely on yours, as I rely on mine."——"Yes."

"Well, then, it occurred to me that we should play at first for our money, and afterward for the first favor which came to us, either from the court or from our our mistress."

"Really, a very ingenious idea," said La Mole, with a smile, "but I confess I am not such a gamester as to risk my whole life on a card or a turn of the dice; for the first favor which may come either to you or to me will, in all probability, involve our whole life. But, if you will, let us play until your six crowns be lost or doubled, and if lost, and you desire to continue the game, you are a gentleman, and your word is as good as gold."

"Done," replied Coconnas; "a gentleman's word is gold, especially when he has credit at court. Thus, believe me, I did not risk too much when I proposed to play for the first favor we might receive at court."

"Doubtless, and you might lose it, but I could not gain it; for, being with the king of Navarre, I could not receive anything from the Duke de Guise."

"Ah, the heretic!" murmured the host, while rubbing up his old casque—"what! I smelled you out, did I!" and he crossed himself devoutly.

"Well, then," continued Coconnas, shuffling the cards which the waiter brought him, "you are of the—"

"What?"—"New religion."

"I?"—"Yes, you."

"Well, say that I am," said La Mole, with a smile, "have you anything against us?"

"No, thank God!—I hate Huguenotry with all my heart, but I do not hate the Huguenots, for they are in fashion just now."

"Yes," replied La Mole, smiling; "to wit, the shooting at the admiral; but let us play."

"Yes, let us play, and fear not, for should I lose a hundred crowns of gold against yours, I shall have wherewithal to pay you to-morrow morning."

"Then your fortune will come while you sleep."—"No; I shall go and find it."

"Where? I'll go with you."

"At the Louvre."

"Are you going back there to-night?"

"Yes; I have, to-night, a private audience with the great Duke de Guise."

Since Coconnas had mentioned the Louvre, La Huriere had left off cleaning his headpiece, and placed himself behind La Mole's chair, so that Coconnas alone could see him, and made signs to him, which the Piedmontese, absorbed in his game and the conversation, did not remark.

"Well, it is very strange," remarked La Mole; "and you were right to say that we were born under the same star. I have also an appointment at the Louvre to-night, but not with the Duke de Guise; mine is with the king of Navarre."

"Have you a countersign?"—"Yes."

"A rallying sign?"—"No."

"Well, I have one, and my countersign is—"

At these words of the Piedmontese, La Huriere made so significant a gesture, that Coconnas, who had just raised his head, was greatly astonished, even more than by the game, at which he had lost three crowns.

"What's the matter?" asked La Mole, but seeing nothing, he shuffled the cards again; while La Huriere retired, placing his finger on his lips to recommend discretion, and leaving Coconnas so amazed, that he again lost almost as rapidly the second time as the first.

"Well," observed La Mole, "this makes exactly your six crowns. Will you have your revenge on your future fortune?"

"Willingly," replied Coconnas.

"But before you begin, did you not say you had an appointment with the Duke de Guise?"

Coconnas turned his looks toward the kitchen, and saw the great eyes of La Huriere.

"Yes," he replied, "but it is not yet the hour. But now let us talk a little about yourself, M. de la Mole."

"We shall do better, I think, by talking of the game, my dear M. de Coconnas; for unless I am very much mistaken, you are in a fair way of losing six more crowns."

"Mordi! and that is true! I always heard that the Huguenots had good luck at cards. Devil take me, if I haven't a good mind to turn Huguenot!"

"Do, count, do," said La Mole; "and you shall be well received among us."

Coconnas scratched his ear.

"If I were sure that your good luck came from that," he said, "I would; for I really do not hold so entirely with mass, and as the king does not think so much of it either—"

"Then it is such a simple religion," said La Mole; "so pure—"

"And, moreover, it is in fashion," said Coconnas; "and it brings good luck at cards; for, devil take me, if you do not hold all the aces, and yet I have watched you closely, and you play very fairly; it must be the religion—"

"You owe me six crowns more," said La Mole, quietly.

"Ah, how you tempt me!" said Coconnas.

"Hush!" said La Mole, "you will get into a quarrel with our host."

"Ah, that is true," said Coconnas, turning his eyes toward the kitchen; "but—no, he is not listening; he is too much occupied at this moment."

"What is he doing?" inquired La Mole, who could see nothing from his place.

"He is talking with—devil take me! it is he!"

"Who?"

"Why, that night-bird with whom he was discoursing when we arrived. The man in the yellow doublet and sad-colored cloak. Mordi! how earnestly he talks."

At this moment, La Huriere came hastily to Coconnas, and whispered in his ear: "Silence, for your life! and get rid of your companion."

Coconnas, turning to La Mole, said: "My dear sir, I must beg you to excuse me. I have lost fifty crowns in no time. I am in bad luck to-night."

"Well, sir, as you please," replied La Mole; "besides, I shall not be sorry to lie down for a time. Master la Huriere!"

"Sir."

"If any one comes for me from the king of Navarre, wake me immediately; I shall be dressed, and consequently ready."

"So shall I," said Coconnas; "and that I may not keep his highness waiting, I will prepare the sign. Master la Huriere, some white paper and scissors!"

"Good-night, M. de Coconnas," said La Mole; "and you, landlord, be so good as to light me to my room. Good luck, my friend!" and La Mole disappeared up the staircase, followed by La Huriere.

Then the mysterious personage, taking Coconnas by the arm, said to him, with much quickness:

"Sir, you have very nearly betrayed a secret on which depends the fate of a kingdom. One word more, and I should have brought you down with my arquebuse. Now we are alone."

"But who are you?"

"Did you ever hear talk of Maurevel?"

"The assassin of the admiral?"

"And of Captain de Mouy."

"Yes."

"Well, I am De Maurevel."

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas.

"Hush!" said Maurevel, putting his finger on his mouth.

Coconnas listened.

At this moment he heard the landlord close the door of a chamber, then the door of a corridor, and bolt it; and then return precipitately to Coconnas and Maurevel, offering each a seat, and taking a third for himself.

"All is close now," he said, "and you may speak out, M. Maurevel."

Eleven o'clock struck by Saint Germain l'Auxerrois; Maurevel counted each stroke of the clock, which sounded full and dull in the night, and, when the last sound had died away:

"Sir," he said, turning to Coconnas, who was amazed at all the precautions taken, "are you a good Catholic?"

"I believe so," replied Coconnas.

"Sir, are you devoted to the king?"

"Body and soul! you offend me, sir, by asking such a question."

"Will you follow us?"

"Whither?"

"That is of no consequence—let me

guide you; your fortune, and perhaps your life, are concerned in the result."

"I tell you, sir, that at midnight I have an appointment at the Louvre."

"That is where we are going."

"M. de Guise awaits me there."

"And us also!"

"But I have a written password."

"And so have we!"

"I have a sign of recognition."

Maurevel drew from beneath his doublet a handful of crosses in white stuff, gave one to La Huriere, one to Coconnas, and took another for himself. La Huriere fastened his to his helmet. Maurevel attached his to the side of his hat.

"Ah, then," said Coconnas, amazed, "the appointment, the countersign, and the rallying mark were for everybody?"

"Yes, sir—that is to say for all good Catholics."

"Then there is a fete at the Louvre—some royal banquet, is there not?" said Coconnas; "and they wish to exclude those hounds of Huguenots—good—capital—excellent! They have had the best of it too long."

"Yes, there is a fete at the Louvre—a royal banquet; and the Huguenots are invited—and more, they will be the heroes of the fete, and will pay for the festival, and if you will be one of us, we will begin by going to invite their principal champion—their Gideon, as they call him."

"The admiral!" cried Coconnas.

"Yes, old Gaspard, whom I missed like a fool, although I aimed at him with the king's arquebuse."

"And this, my gentleman, is why I was furbishing my helmet, sharpening my sword, and putting an edge on my knives," said La Huriere, with a loud and bear-like voice.

At these words, Coconnas shuddered and turned very pale, for he began to comprehend.

"Then really," he exclaimed, "this fete—this banquet is a—"

"You are a long time guessing, sir," said Maurevel, "and it is easy to see that you are not so weary of these insolent heretics as we are."

"And you take on yourself," he said, "to go to the admiral and to—"

Maurevel smiled, and drawing Coconnas to the window, he said:

"Look there!—do you see, in the small square at the end of the street, behind the church, a troop drawn up quietly in the shadow?"

"Yes."

"The men who form that troop have, like Master la Huriere, and myself, and yourself, a cross in their hats."

"Well!"

"Well, these men are a company of Swiss, from the smaller cantons, commanded by Toquenot—you know they are friends of the king."

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas.

"Now, look at that troop of horse passing along the quay—do you recognize their leader?"

"How can I recognize him?" asked Coconnas, with a shudder, "when it was only this evening that I arrived in Paris?"

"Well, then, it is he with whom you have a rendezvous at the Louvre at midnight. See, he is going to wait for you!"

"The Duke de Guise?"

"Himself! His escorts are, Marcel, the ex-provost of the tradesmen, and Jean Chorou, the present provost. These two are going to summon their companies, and here comes the captain of the quarter. See what he will do!"

"He knocks at each door; but what is there on the doors at which he knocks?"

"A white cross, young man, such as that which we have in our hats."

"But at each house at which he knocks they open, and from each house there come out armed citizens."

"He will knock here in turn, and we shall in turn go out."

"But," said Coconnas, "if all the world is on foot to go and kill one old Huguenot—Mordi! it is shameful! It is an affair of cut-throats, and not of soldiers."

"Young man," replied Maurevel, "if the old are objectionable to you, you may choose young ones—you will find plenty for all tastes. If you despise daggers, use you sword, for the Huguenots are not the

men to allow their throats to be cut without defending themselves, and you know that Huguenots, young or old, are hard-lived."

"But are they going to kill them all, then?" cried Coconnas.

"All!"

"By order of the king?"

"By order of the king and M. de Guise."

"And when?"

"When you hear the clock of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois strike."

"Oh, it was for that, then, that the amiable German told me to hasten at the first sound of the tocsin."

"You have, then, seen M. de Besme?"

"I have seen and spoken to him."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre."

"Look there!"

"Mordi!—'tis he himself."

"Would you speak with him?"

"Why, really, I should like to do so."

Maurevel opened the window instantly; Besme was passing at the moment with twenty soldiers.

"Guise and Lorraine!" said Maurevel.

Besme turned round, and perceiving that it was himself who was accosted, he came under the window.

"Oh, is it you, Sirè de Maurevel?"

"Yes, 'tis I, what seek you?"

"I am seeking the hostelry of the Belle Etoile, to find a Monsieur Coconnas."

"I am here, M. de Besme," said the young man.

"Good, good; are you ready?"

"Yes—to do what?"

"Whatever M. de Maurevel may tell you, for he is a good Catholic."

"Do you hear?" inquired Maurevel.

"Yes," replied Coconnas, "but, M. de Besme!—where are you going?"

"I am going to say a word to the admiral."

"Say two, if necessary," said Maurevel, "and this time, if he gets up again at the first, do not let him rise at the second."

"Make yourself easy, M. de Maurevel, and put the young gentleman in the right path."

"Ah, have no fear for me: the Coconnas have keen scent, and good-bred dogs hunt from instinct."

"Adieu! begin the chase, for we are in the slot of the deer."

De Besme went on, and Maurevel closed the window.

"You hear, young man," said Maurevel, "if you have any private enemy, although he is not altogether a Huguenot, you can put him on your list, and he will pass with the others."

Coconnas, more bewildered than ever with what he saw and heard, looked about him, at the host and Maurevel, who quietly drew a paper from his pocket. "Here's my list," said he; "three hundred. Let each good Catholic do this night one-tenth part of the business I shall do, and to-morrow there will not remain one single heretic in the kingdom."

"Hush!" said La Huriere.

"What is it?" inquired Coconnas and Maurevel together.

They heard the first stroke of the bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois vibrate.

"The signal!" exclaimed Maurevel. "The time is put on—for it was agreed for midnight. So much the better. When it is the interest of God and the king, it is better that the clock should be put forward than backward." And the sinister sound of the church bell was distinctly heard. Then a shot was fired, and in an instant, the light of several flambeaux blazed up like flashes of lightning in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec.

Coconnas passed his hand over his brow, which was damp with perspiration.

"It has begun!" cried Maurevel. "Now to work—away!"

"One moment, one moment!" said the host. "Before we begin, let us make safe the house. I do not wish to have my wife and children killed in my absence. There is a Huguenot here."

"M. de la Mole!" said Coconnas, starting.

"Yes, the fowl has thrown himself into the wolf's throat."

"What!" said Coconnas; "would you attack your guest?"

"It was for him I gave an extra edge to my rapier."

"Oh, oh!" said the Piedmontese, frowning.

"I never yet killed anything but rabbits, ducks and chickens," replied the worthy host, "and I do not know very well how to kill a man; but I can make my first trial on him, and if I am clumsy, no one will be there to laugh at me."

"Mordi! it is hard," said Coconnas. "M. de la Mole is my companion; M. de la Mole has supped with me; M. de la Mole has played with me."

"Yes; but M. de la Mole is a heretic," said Maurevel. "M. de la Mole is doomed; and if we do not kill him, others will."

"Not to say," added the host, "that he has gained fifty crowns from you."

"True," said Coconnas; "but, fairly, I am sure."

"Fairly, or not, you must pay them, while, if I kill him, you are quits."

"Come, come!" cried Maurevel; "make haste, or we shall not be in time with the aid we have promised M. de Guise, at the admiral's."

Coconnas sighed.

"I'll make haste!" cried La Huriere, "wait for me."

"Mordi!" cried Coconnas, "he will put the poor gentleman to great pain, and, perhaps, rob him. I must be present to finish him, if requisite, and to prevent him from touching his money."

And impelled by this happy thought, Coconnas followed La Huriere upstairs, and soon overtook him, for the latter slackened his pace when he approached the intended victim.

As he reached the door, Coconnas still following, several discharges of musketry in the streets were heard.

"Diable!" muttered La Huriere, somewhat disconcerted; "that has awakened him, I think."

"I should say so," observed Coconnas, "and he will defend himself; I do not know a likelier man. Suppose now, Master la Huriere, he were to kill you, that would be droll, eh?"

"Hum, hum!" responded the host, but knowing himself to be armed with a good arquebuse, he dashed the door in with a kick of his foot.

La Mole, without his hat, but dressed, was intrenched behind his bed, his sword between his teeth, and his pistols in his hands.

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas, his nostrils expanding like a wild beast who smelled blood—"this grows interesting, Master la Huriere.—Forward!"

"Ah, you would assassinate me, it seems!" cried La Mole, whose eyes glared; "and it is you, wretch!"

Master la Huriere's reply to this was to take aim at the young man with his arquebuse; but La Mole was on his guard, and as he fired, went on his knees, and the ball passed over his head.

"Help!" cried La Mole; "help, M. de Coconnas!"

"Help, M. de Maurevel!—help!" cried La Huriere.

"Ma foi! M. de la Mole," replied Coconnas, "all I can do in this affair is not to join the attack against you. It seems, all the Huguenots are to be put to death to-night, in the king's name. Get out of it as well as you can."

"Ah, traitors! assassins!—is it so? Well, then, take this!" And La Mole, aiming in his turn, fired one of his pistols. La Huriere, who had kept his eye on him, moved suddenly on one side; but Coconnas, not anticipating such a reply, had not stirred, and the ball grazed his shoulder.

"Mordi!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth—"I have it. Well, then, let it be us two, since you will have it so!"—and drawing his rapier, he rushed on La Mole.

Had he been alone, La Mole would, doubtless, have awaited his attack; but Coconnas had La Huriere to aid him, who was reloading his gun, and Maurevel, who was coming rapidly up the stairs. La Mole, therefore, dashed into a small closet, which he bolted inside.

"Ah, coward!" cried Coconnas, furious, and striking at the door with the pommel of his sword—"wait! wait! and I will make as many holes in your body as you have gained crowns of me to-night. Wait for me, poltroon—wait for me!"

La Huriere fired his arquebuse at the lock, and the door flew open.

Coconnas rushed into the closet, but it was empty, and the window open.

"He has thrown himself out," said the host, "and as we are on the fourth story, he must be killed."

"Or, he has escaped by the roof of the next house," said Coconnas, putting his leg over the bar of the window, and preparing to follow him over this narrow and slippery route; but Maurevel and La Huriere drew him back into the apartment.

"Are you mad?" they both exclaimed at once; "you will kill yourself!"

"Bah!" said Coconnas, "I am a mountaineer, and used to traverse the glaciers; besides, when a man has once offended me, I will go up to heaven or descend to hell with him, by whatever route he pleases. Let me do as I wish."

"Well," said Maurevel, "he is either dead or a long way off by this time. Come with us; and if he escape you, there will be a thousand others in his place."

"You are right," cried Coconnas. "Death to the Huguenots! I want revenge, and the sooner the better."

And the three descended the staircase like an avalanche.

"To the admiral's!" shouted Maurevel.

"To the admiral's!" shouted La Huriere.

"To the admiral's, then, if it must be so!" shouted Coconnas.

And all three, leaving the Belle Etoile in charge of Gregoire and the other waiters, hastened toward the Rue de Bethisy, a bright light, and the report of fire-arms, guiding them in that direction.

"Who comes here?" cried Coconnas. "A man without his doublet or scarf!"

"It is some one escaping," said Maurevel.

"Fire! fire!" said Coconnas, "you who have arquebuses."

"Ma foi! not I," replied Maurevel. "I keep my powder for better game."

"You, then, La Huriere!"

"Wait, wait!" said the innkeeper, taking aim.

"Oh, yes, wait, and he will escape," replied Coconnas.

And he rushed after the unhappy wretch, whom he soon overtook, as he was wounded; but at the moment when, in order that he might not strike him behind, he exclaimed, "Turn, turn!" the report of an arquebuse was heard, a ball whistled by Coconnas's ears, and the fugitive rolled over, like a hare struck by the shot of the sportsman.

A cry of triumph was heard behind Coconnas. The Piedmontese turned round and saw La Huriere brandishing his weapon.

"Ah, now," he exclaimed, "I have made my maiden shot!"

"And only just missed making a hole in me, from one side to the other."

"Be on your guard!—be on your guard!"

Coconnas sprung back. The wounded man had risen on his knee, and, full of revenge, was about to stab him with his poniard, when the host's warning put the Piedmontese on his guard.

"Ah, viper!" shouted Coconnas; and rushing at the wounded man, he thrust his sword through him three times up to the hilt.

"And now," cried he, leaving the Huguenot in the agonies of death—"to the admiral's!—to the admiral's!"

"Ah, ah! my gentlemen," said Maurevel, "it seems to work."

"Ma foi! yes," replied Coconnas. "I do not know if it is the smell of gunpowder that makes me drunk, or the sight of blood which excites me, but mordi! I am all anxious for slaughter. It is like a battue of men. I have as yet only had battues of bears and wolves, and, on my honor, a battue of men seems more amusing." And the three went on their way.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VICTIMS.

THE hotel of the admiral was, as we have said, situated in the Rue de Bethisy. It was a large house, opening on a court in front, flanked by two wings. One principal and two small gates afforded entrance into this courtyard.

When our three cut-throats entered the Rue Bethisy, which forms part of the Rue

des Fosses St. Germain l'Auxerrois, they saw the hotel surrounded with Swiss soldiers and citizens, all armed to the teeth, some holding drawn swords, others arquebuses loaded and the matches burning, and some, in their left hand, torches that threw a fitful and lurid glare on this sea of human heads and naked weapons. The work of destruction was proceeding in the Rues Tirechappe, Etienne, and Bertin-Poirée. Agonized cries and the reports of muskets were heard incessantly; and, occasionally, some wretched fugitive rushed wildly through what, seen by the uncertain light, seemed a troop of demons.

In an instant, Coconnas, Maurevel, and La Huriere, accredited by their white crosses, and received with cries of welcome, were in the midst of the tumult, though they could not have entered the throng, had not Maurevel been recognized. Coconnas and La Huriere followed him, and all three contrived to enter the court.

In the center of this court, the three doors of which were burst open, a man, around whom a body of Catholics formed a respectful circle, stood leaning on his drawn rapier, and eagerly looking up at a balcony about fifteen feet above him, which extended in front of the principal window of the hotel.

This man stamped impatiently on the ground, and, from time to time, questioned those around him.

"Nothing yet!" murmured he. "No one! He has been warned, and has escaped. What do you think, Du Gast?"

"Impossible, monseigneur."

"Why? Did you not tell me, that just before we arrived, a man, bareheaded, a drawn sword in his hand, came running, as if pursued, knocked at the door, and was admitted?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but M. de Besme came up immediately, broke open the doors, and surrounded the hotel. The man went in, sure enough, but he has not gone out."

"Why," said Coconnas to La Huriere, "if my eyes do not deceive me, it is M. de Guise I see."

"Himself, monsieur. Yes; the great Henry de Guise is come in person to watch for the admiral, and serve him as he served the duke's father. Every one has his day, and it is our turn now."

"Hola, Besme!" cried the duke, with his powerful voice, "have you not finished yet?"

And he struck his sword so forcibly against the stones that sparks flew out.

At this instant cries were heard in the hotel—then several shots—then a clashing of swords, and then all was again silent.

The duke was about to rush into the house.

"Monseigneur, monseigneur!" said Du Gast, detaining him, "your dignity commands you to wait here."

"You are right, Du Gast. I must stay here; but I am dying with anxiety. If he were to escape!"

Suddenly the windows of the first floor were lighted up with what seemed the reflection of torches.

The window, on which the duke's eyes were fixed, opened, or, rather, was shattered to pieces, and a man, his face and collar stained with blood, appeared on the balcony.

"Ah! at last, Besme!" cried the duke: "what news?"

"Here! here!" replied the German, with the greatest sang-froid, lifting, as he spoke, a heavy body.

"But where are the others?" demanded the duke.

"The others are finishing the rest."

"And what have *you* done?"

"You shall see. Stand back a little."

The duke retreated a few paces.

The object that Besme was trying to lift was now visible; it was the body of an old man. He raised it above the balcony, and threw it, by a powerful effort, at his master's feet,

The heavy fall, and the blood that gushed forth, startled even the duke himself; but curiosity soon overpowered fear, and the light of the torches was speedily thrown on the body.

A white beard, a venerable visage, and limbs contracted by death, were then visible. "The admiral!" cried twenty voices, as instantaneously hushed.

"Yes, the admiral!" said the duke, approaching the corpse and contemplating it with silent ecstasy.

"The admiral! the admiral!" repeated the witnesses of this terrible scene, timidly approaching the old man, majestic even in death.

"Ah, at last, Gaspard!" said the Duke de Guise, triumphantly. "Murderer of my father! thus do I avenge him!"

And the duke dared to plant his foot on the breast of the Protestant hero. But, instantly, the dying warrior opened his eyes, his bleeding and mutilated hand clenched itself, and the admiral, with a sepulchral voice, said to the duke:

"Henry de Guise, one day the foot of the assassin shall be planted on thy breast! I did not kill thy father, and I curse thee!"

The duke, pale, and trembling in spite of himself, felt a cold shudder come over him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to dispel the fearful vision; and when he dared again to glance at the admiral, his eyes were closed, his hand unclenched, and a stream of black blood poured over his silvery beard from that mouth which had so lately uttered the terrible denunciation against his murderer.

The duke lifted his sword, with a gesture of desperate resolution.

"Are you satisfied, monseigneur?" asked Besme.

"Yes," returned Henry; "for thou hast avenged—"

"The Duke Francois!" said De Besme.

"The Catholic religion," returned Henry. Then, turning to the soldiers and citizens who filled the court and street, "To work, my friends, to work!"

"Good-evening, M. de Besme," said Coconnas, approaching the German, who stood on the balcony, wiping his sword.

"It was you, then, who settled him!" cried La Huriere; "how did you manage it?"

"Oh, very easily: he heard a noise, opened his door, and I ran him through the body. But I think they are killing Teligny now, for I hear him yelling."

At this moment, several cries of distress were heard, and the windows of the long gallery that formed a wing of the hotel were lighted up with a red glare; two men were seen flying before a body of assassins. An arquebuse-shot killed one; the other sprang boldly, and without stopping to look at the distance from the ground, through an open window into the court below, heeding not the enemies who awaited him there.

"Kill! kill!" cried the assassins, seeing their prey about to escape them.

The fugitive picked up his sword, which in his leap had fallen from his hand, dashed through the soldiers, upset three or four, ran one through the body, and, amid the pistol-shots and imprecations of the furious Catholics, darted like lightning by Coconnas, who stood ready for him at the door.

"Touched!" cried the Piedmontese, piercing his arm with his sharp blade.

"Coward!" replied the fugitive, striking him on the face with the flat of his weapon, for want of room to thrust at him with its point.

"A thousand devils!" cried Coconnas; "it's M. de la Mole!"

"M. de la Mole!" re-echoed La Huriere and Maurevel.

"It is he who warned the admiral!" cried several soldiers.

"Kill him—kill him!" was shouted on all sides.

Coconnas, La Huriere, and half a score of soldiers rushed in pursuit of La Mole, who, covered with blood, and having attained that state of desperation which is the last resource of human strength, dashed wildly through the streets, with no other guide than instinct. Behind him, the footsteps and shouts of his pursuers gave him wings. Occasionally a ball whistled by his ear, and made him dart forward with redoubled speed. He no longer seemed to breathe: it was a hoarse rattle which came from his chest. His pourpoint seemed to prevent his heart from beating, and he tore it off: soon his sword became too heavy for his hand, and he threw it away. The blood and perspiration matted his hair, and trickled in heavy drops down his face. Sometimes it seemed to him that he was

gaining on his pursuers, and he could hear their steps die away in the distance; but at their cries, fresh murderers started up at every turn, and continued the chase; suddenly he perceived, on his left, the river, rolling silently on; he felt, like the stag at bay, an invincible desire to plunge into it: the supreme power of reason alone restrained him. On his right was the Louvre, dark and frowning, but full of strange and ominous sounds; soldiers on the drawbridge came and went, and helmets and cuirasses glittered in the moonlight. La Mole thought of the king of Navarre, as he had before thought of Coligny: they were his only protectors—it was his last hope. He collected all his strength, and inwardly vowing to abjure his faith should he escape massacre, he rushed by the soldiers, on to the drawbridge, received another poniard stab in the side, and despite the cries of "Kill—kill!" that resounded on all sides, and the opposing weapons of the sentinels, darted like an arrow through the court, into the vestibule, mounted the staircase, then up two stories higher, recognized a door, and leaned against it, striking it violently with his hands and feet.

"Who is there?" asked a woman's voice.

"Oh, my God!" murmured La Mole—"they are coming, I hear them; 'tis I—'tis I!"

"Who are you?" said the voice.

La Mole recollected the password.

"Navarre—Navarre!" cried he.

The door instantly opened. La Mole, without thanking, or even seeing Gillonne, dashed into the vestibule, then along a corridor, through two or three chambers, until, at last, he entered a room lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Beneath curtains of velvet with gold fleurs-de-lis, in a bed of carved oak, a lady, wrapped in a dressing-gown, raised herself on her arm, and gazed with terror.

La Mole precipitated himself toward her.

"Madame," cried he, "they are killing, they are butchering my brothers—they seek to kill me also! You are queen—save me!"

And he threw himself at her feet, leaving on the carpet a large track of blood.

At the sight of a man, pale, exhausted, and bleeding at her feet, the queen of Navarre, who, warned by Madame de Lorraine, had laid down without undressing herself, clasped her hands over her eyes and shrieked for help.

"Madame," cried La Mole, "for the love of Heaven, do not call! If you do, I am lost, for my murderers are at hand; they are on the stairs—hark! I hear them now!"

"Help!" cried the queen—help!"

"Ah!" said La Mole, despairingly, "you have killed me. I did not think it possible to die by so sweet a voice, so fair a hand!"

At the same time, the door flew open, and a troop of men, their faces covered with blood and blackened with powder, their swords drawn, and their pikes and arquebuses leveled, rushed into the apartment.

Coconnas was at their head—his red hair bristling, his eye flashing fire, and his cheek cut open by La Mole's sword. The Piedmontese was terrible to behold.

"Mordi!" cried he, "we have him at last."

La Mole looked round him for a weapon, but in vain; he glanced at the queen, and saw profound commiseration depicted in her face; he at once felt that she alone could save him; he threw his arms round her.

Coconnas advanced, and with the point of his long rapier again wounded his enemy's shoulder, and the crimson drops of warm blood stained the white and perfumed sheets of Marguerite's couch.

Marguerite saw the blood flow and felt the shudder that ran through La Mole's frame; she threw herself with him into the recess between the bed and the wall. It was time: for La Mole was incapable of flight or resistance, his head leaned on Marguerite's shoulder, and his hand convulsively seized and tore its thin cambric covering.

"Oh, madame," murmured he, "save me."

He could say no more. A mist came

over his eyes, his head sunk back, his arms fell at his side, and he sunk on the floor, bathed in his blood, and dragging the queen with him.

At this moment, Coconnas, excited by the sight of blood, and exasperated by the long pursuit, advanced toward the recess; in another instant, his sword would have pierced La Mole's heart, and perhaps that of Marguerite also.

At the sight of the bare steel, and even more moved at the insolence of the man, the daughter of kings drew herself up to her full height, and sent forth such a cry of fear, indignation, and rage, that Coconnas stood petrified.

Suddenly, a door in the wall opened and a young man of sixteen or seventeen, dressed in black and his hair in disorder, rushed in.

"Hold! hold!" cried he; "I am here, my sister—I am here!"

"Francois! Francois!" cried Marguerite—"help! help!"

"The Duke d'Alencon!" murmured La Huriere, grounding his arquebuse.

"Mordi! a son of France!" growled Coconnas, drawing back.

The duke glanced round him. He saw Marguerite, disheveled, more lovely than ever, leaning against the wall surrounded by men, fury in her eyes, large drops of perspiration on her forehead.

"Wretches!" cried he.

"Save me, my brother!" shrieked Marguerite. "They are going to kill me!"

The duke's pallid face became crimson. He was unarmed, but sustained, no doubt, by the consciousness of his rank, he advanced with clenched teeth and hands toward Coconnas and his companions, who retreated, terrified at the lightning darting from his eyes.

"Ha! and will you murder a son of France, too?" cried the duke. Then, as they recoiled—"Without there! captain of the guard! Hang me every one of these ruffians!"

More alarmed at the sight of this weaponless young man than he would have been at the aspect of a regiment of lansquenets, Coconnas had already reached the door. La Huriere sprang after him like a deer, and the soldiers jostled and pushed each other in the vestibule, in their endeavors to escape, finding the door far too small for their great desire to be outside it. Meantime Marguerite had instinctively thrown the damask coverlid of her bed over La Mole, and withdrawn from him.

No sooner had the last murderer departed than the duke turned to his sister.

"Are you hurt?" cried he, seeing Marguerite covered with blood. And he darted toward his sister with an anxiety that did credit to his fraternal tenderness.

"No," said she, "I think not; or, if I am, it is but slightly."

"But this blood," said the duke; "whence comes it?"

"I know not," replied she, "one of those wretches seized me, and perhaps he was wounded."

"What!" cried the duke, "dare to touch my sister? Oh, had you but shown him to me—did I but know where to find him—"

"Leave me," said Marguerite.

"Well, Marguerite," said he, "I will go; but you cannot remain alone this dreadful night. Shall I call Gillonne?"

"No, no! leave me, Francois—leave me!"

The prince obeyed; and hardly had he disappeared than Marguerite, hearing a groan from the recess, hastily bolted the door of the secret passage, and then hastening to the other entrance, closed it just as a troop of archers dashed by in hot chase of some other Huguenot residents in the Louvre.

After glancing round, to assure herself she was really alone, she lifted the covering that had concealed La Mole from the Duke d'Alencon, and tremblingly drawing the apparently lifeless body, by great exertion, into the middle of the room, and finding the victim still breathed, sat down, placed his head on her knees, and sprinkled his face with water.

Then it was that, the mask of blood, dust, and gunpowder which had covered his face being removed, Marguerite recognized the handsome cavalier who, full of

life and hope, had but three or four hours before solicited her protection and that of the king of Navarre; and while dazzled by her own beauty, had attracted her attention by his own.

Marguerite uttered a cry of terror, for now it was more than mere pity that she felt for the wounded man—it was interest. He was no longer a stranger; he was almost an acquaintance. By her care, La Mole's fine features soon reappeared, free from stain, but pale and distorted by pain. A shudder ran through her whole frame as she tremblingly placed her hand on his heart. It still beat. She then took a smelling-bottle from the table, and applied it to his nostrils.

La Mole opened his eyes.

"Oh! mon Dieu!" murmured he—"where am I?"

"Saved!" said Marguerite. "Reassure yourself—you are saved."

La Mole turned his eyes on the queen, gazed earnestly for a moment, and murmuring—"Oh, loveliest of the lovely!" closed his lids, as if overpowered, and sent forth a long, deep sigh.

Marguerite started. He had become still paler than before, if that were possible, and she feared that sigh was his last.

"Oh, Heaven!" she cried, "have pity on him!"

At this moment a violent knocking was heard at the door. Marguerite half raised herself, still supporting La Mole.

"Who is there?" she cried.

"Madame, it is I—it is I," replied a female voice; "the Duchesse de Nevers."

"Henriette!" cried Marguerite.—"There is no danger; it is my friend. Do you hear me, sir?"

La Mole contrived to raise himself on one knee.

"Endeavor to support yourself," said the queen.

La Mole, resting his hand on the ground, managed to keep his equilibrium.

Marguerite advanced toward the door, but stopped suddenly.

"Ah, you are not alone!" she said, hearing the clash of arms outside.

"No, I have twelve guards, that my brother-in-law, M. de Guise, assigned me."

"M. de Guise!" murmured La Mole. "The assassin—the assassin!"

"Silence!" said Marguerite. "Not a word!"

And she looked round, to see where she could conceal the wounded man.

"A sword! a dagger!" muttered La Mole.

"To defend yourself—useless! Did you not hear? They are twelve, and you alone."

"Not to defend myself, but that I may not fall alive into their hands."

"No, no!" said Marguerite. "I will save you. Ah! this cabinet! Come! come!"

La Mole made an effort, and, supported by Marguerite, dragged himself to the cabinet. Marguerite locked the door upon him, and hid the key in her alms-purse.

"Not a sound, not a movement," whispered she, through the lattice-work, "and you are saved."

Then hastily throwing a mantle round her, she opened the door for her friend, who tenderly embraced her.

"Ah!" cried Madame Nevers, "you are unhurt, then?"

"Quite," replied Marguerite, wrapping the mantle still more closely round her, to conceal the blood on her dress.

"'Tis well. However, M. de Guise has given me twelve of his guards to escort me to his hotel, and as I do not need so many, I will leave six with your majesty. Six of the duke's guards are worth a regiment of the king's to-night."

Marguerite dared not refuse: she placed the soldiers in the corridor, and embraced the duchess, who then returned to the Hotel de Guise, where she resided in her husband's absence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDERERS.

COCONNAS had not fled, he had but retreated; La Huriere had not fled, he had flown. The one had disappeared like a tiger, the other like a wolf.

The consequence was, that La Huriere had already reached the Place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois when Coconnas had only just quitted the Louvre.

La Huriere was prudently thinking of returning home, but as he turned the corner, in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, he fell in with a troop of Swiss and light horse, led by Maurevel.

"Well!" exclaimed the latter, who had christened himself the King's Killer, "have you finished already? What the devil have you done with our Piedmontese gentleman? Has any mischance happened to him? It would be a pity, for he went to work like a hero."

"I hope not," responded La Huriere; "and where are you going to?"

"Oh, I have a small private affair."

"Then let me go with you," said a voice which made Maurevel start; "for you know all the good places."

"It is M. de Coconnas," said La Huriere.

"Ah! you have come from the Louvre. Did your Huguenot, then, take refuge there?" asked Maurevel.

"Mon Dieu! yes."

"I gave him a pistol-shot at the moment when he was picking up his sword in the admiral's courtyard, but I somehow or other missed him."

"I," added Coconnas, "did not miss him: I gave him such a thrust in the back that my sword was wet five inches up the blade. Besides, I saw him fall into the arms of Madame Marguerite, a fine woman, mordi! yet I confess I should not be sorry to hear he was really dead; the vagabond is infernally spiteful, and capable of bearing me a grudge all his life."

"Do you mean to go with me?"

"Why, I do not like standing still. Mordi! I have only killed three or four as yet, and when I get cold my shoulder pains me.—Forward! forward!"

"Captain," said Maurevel to the commander of the troop, "give me three men, and go on your own way with the rest."

Three Swiss were desired to follow Maurevel, who, followed by Coconnas and La Huriere, went toward the Rue Sainte Avoie.

"Where the devil are we going?" asked Coconnas.

"To the Rue du Chaume, where we have important business."

"Tell me," said Coconnas, "is not the Rue du Chaume near the Temple?"

"Why?"

"Because an old creditor of our family lives there, one Lambert Mercandon, to whom my father has desired me to hand over a hundred rose nobles I have in my pocket for that purpose."

"Well," replied Maurevel, "this is a good opportunity for paying it. This is the day for settling old accounts. Is your Mercandon a Huguenot?"

"Oh, I understand!" said Coconnas; "he must be—"

"Hush! here we are."

"What is that large hotel, with its entrance in the street."

"The Hotel de Guise."

"Truly," returned Coconnas, "I ought not to have failed coming here, as I am under the patronage of the great Henry. But, mordi! all is so very quiet in this quarter, we might fancy ourselves in the country. Devil fetch me, but everybody is asleep!"

And indeed the Hotel de Guise seemed as quiet as in ordinary times. All the windows were closed, and a solitary light burned behind the blind of the principal window over the entrance. At the corner of the Rue des Quatre-Fils, Maurevel stopped.

"This is the house of him we seek," he said. "Do you, La Huriere, with your sleek look, knock at the door; hand your arquebuse to M. de Coconnas, who has been ogling it this last half hour. If you are introduced, you must ask to speak to M. de Mouy."

"Oh!" said Coconnas, "now I understand - you have a creditor in the quarter of the Temple, it would seem."

"Exactly so!" responded Maurevel. "You will go up to him in the character of a Huguenot, and inform M. de Mouy of all that has passed: he is brave, and will come down."

"And once down—?" asked La Huriere.

"Once down, I will beg of him to cross swords with me."

La Huriere, without making any reply, knocked at the door, and the sounds echoing in the silence of the night, caused the doors of the Hotel de Guise to open, and several heads to make their appearance from out them; it was then evident that the hotel was quiet, after the fashion of citadels, that is to say, in being filled with soldiers. The heads were instantly withdrawn, guessing, no doubt, what was the matter.

"Does your M. de Mouy live here?" inquired Coconnas, pointing to the house at which La Huriere continued to knock.

"No, but his mistress does."

"Mordi! how gallant you are, to give him an occasion to draw sword in the presence of his lady-love! We shall be the judges of the field. I should like very well to fight myself—my shoulder burns."

"And your face," asked Maurevel, "it is considerably damaged, is it not?"

Coconnas uttered a kind of growl.

"Mordi!" he said, "I hope he is dead; if I thought not, I would return to the Louvre and finish him."

La Huriere still kept knocking.

Soon the window on the first floor opened, and a man appeared in the balcony, in a nightcap and drawers, and unarmed.

"Who's there?" cried he.

Maurevel made a sign to the Swiss, who retreated into a corner, while Coconnas stood close against the wall.

"Ah! Monsieur de Mouy!" said the innkeeper, in his blandest tones, "is that you?"

"Yes; what then?"

"It is he!" said Maurevel, joyfully.

"Well, then, sir," continued La Huriere, "do you not know what is going on? They are murdering the admiral, and all of our religion. Hasten to their assistance!"

"Ah!" exclaimed De Mouy, "I feared something was plotted for this night. I ought not to have quitted my brave comrades. I will come, my friend—wait for me."

And without closing the window, through which issued the voice of a female in alarm, uttering tender supplications, M. de Mouy put on his doublet, cloak, and weapons.

"He is coming down, he is coming down; be ready!" murmured Maurevel, pale with joy, and taking the arquebuse from Coconnas, and blazing the match, to see that it was alight, returned it to La Huriere.

"Mordi!" exclaimed Coconnas, "the moon is coming out to see this beautiful little fight. I would give a great deal if Lambert Mercandon were here, to serve as M. de Mouy's second."

"Wait, wait!" said Maurevel; "M. de Mouy is equal to several men himself, and it is likely that we six shall have enough to do to dispatch him. Forward, my men!" continued Maurevel, making a sign to the Swiss to stand by the door, in order to strike De Mouy as he came forth.

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas, as he watched these arrangements, "it appears that this will not come off quite as I expected."

Already was heard the sound of the bar which De Mouy moved aside. The Swiss were at the door; Maurevel and La Huriere came forward on tiptoe, while, from a feeling of honor, Coconnas remained where he was, when a young female, whom no one had expected, appeared, in her turn, in the balcony, and gave a terrible shriek when she saw the Swiss, Maurevel, and La Huriere.

De Mouy, who had already half opened the door, paused.

"Return, return!" cried the damsel. "I see swords glitter, and the match of an arquebuse—there is treachery!"

"Ah, ah!" said the young man, "let us see, then, what it means."

And he closed the door, replaced the bar, and went upstairs again.

Maurevel's order of battle was changed as soon as he saw that De Mouy did not come out. The Swiss went and posted themselves at the other corner of the street, and La Huriere, with his arquebuse in his hand, awaited the reappearance of the enemy at the window.

He did not wait long.

D'ALENCON.

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De Mouy came forward, holding before him two pistols of such respectable length that La Huriere, who was taking aim, suddenly reflected that the Huguenot's balls had no further to go in reaching him than had his to reach the balcony. "It is true," said he, "I may kill the gentleman; but it is equally true that the gentleman may kill me!" and this reflection determined him to retreat into an angle of the Rue de Brac, so far off, as to make any aim of his at De Mouy somewhat uncertain.

De Mouy cast a glance around him and advanced like a man preparing to fight a duel; but seeing nothing, he exclaimed:

"Why, it appears, my friend, that you have forgotten your arquebuse at my door! I am here. What do you want with me?"

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas to himself; "this is a brave fellow!"

"Well," continued De Mouy, "friends or enemies, whichever you are, do you not see I am waiting?"

La Huriere kept silence, Maurevel made no reply, and the three Swiss remained in covert.

Coconnas paused an instant; then, seeing that no one continued the conversation begun by La Huriere and followed by De Mouy, left his station, and advancing into the middle of the street, took off his hat, and said:

"Sir, we are not here for an assassination, as you seem to suppose, but for a duel. Eh, mordi! come forward, Monsieur de Maurevel, instead of turning your back. The gentleman accepts."

"Maurevel!" cried De Mouy; "Maurevel, the assassin of my father! Maurevel, the king's assassin! Ah, pardieu! Yes, I accept."

And taking aim at Maurevel, who was about to knock at the Hotel de Guise to request a re-enforcement, he sent a ball through his hat.

At the noise of the report and Maurevel's cries, the guard which had escorted Madame de Nevers came out, accompanied by three or four gentlemen, followed by their pages, and approached the house of young De Mouy's mistress.

A second pistol-shot, fired into the midst of the troop, killed the soldier next to Maurevel; after which De Mouy, having no longer any loaded arms, sheltered himself within the gallery of the balcony.

Meantime, windows began to be opened in every direction, and according to the respective dispositions of their pacific or bellicose inhabitants, were closed, or bristled with muskets and arquebuses.

"Help! my worthy Mercandon," shouted De Mouy, making a sign to a man in years, who, from a window which opened in front of the Hotel de Guise, was trying to make out the cause of the confusion.

"Is it you who call, Sirè de Mouy?" cried the old man; "is it you they are attacking?"

"Me—you—all the Protestants; and there—there is the proof!"

That moment, De Mouy had seen La Huriere direct his arquebuse at him: it was fired; but the young man stooped, and the ball broke a window behind him.

"Mercandon!" exclaimed Coconnas, who, in his delight at sight of the tumult, had forgotten his creditor, but was reminded of him by this apostrophe of De Mouy—"Mercandon, Rue du Chaume—that is it! Ah, he lives there! Good! We shall each arrange our affairs with our men!"

And, while the people from the Hotel de Guise broke in the doors of De Mouy's house, and Maurevel, torch in hand, tried to set it on fire—while, the doors once broken, there was a fearful struggle with an antagonist who at each pistol-shot and each rapier-thrust brought down his foe—Coconnas tried, by the help of a paving-stone, to break in the door of Mercandon, who, unmoved by this solitary effort, was doing his best with his arquebuse out of his window.

And now, all this desert and obscure quarter was lighted up as if by open day—peopled like the interior of an ant-hive; for, from the Hotel de Montmorency, six or eight Huguenot gentlemen, with their servants and friends, issuing forth, made a furious charge, and began, supported by the firing from the windows, to repulse Maurevel's and the De Guises' force,

whom at length they drove back to the place whence they had come.

Coconnas, who had not yet managed to drive in Mercandon's door, though he tried to do so with all his might, was surprised in this sudden retreat. Placing his back to the wall, and grasping his sword firmly, he began, not only to defend himself, but to attack his assailants, with cries so terrible, that they were heard above all the uproar. He struck right and left, hitting friends and enemies, until a wide space was cleared around him. In proportion as his rapier made a hole in some breast, and the warm blood spurted over on his hands and face, he, with dilated eye, expanded nostrils, and clenched teeth, regained the ground he had lost, and again approached the beleaguered house.

De Mouy, after a terrible combat in the staircase and hall, had ended by coming out of the burning house like a true hero. In the midst of all the struggle, he had not ceased to cry, "Here, Maurevel!—Maurevel, where are you?" insulting him by the most opprobrious epithets. He at length appeared in the street, supporting on one arm his mistress, half naked and nearly fainting, and holding a poniard between his teeth. His sword, flaming by the sweeping action he gave it, traced circles of white or red, according as the moon glittered on the blade or a flambeau glared on its blood-stained brightness. Maurevel had fled. La Huriere, driven back by De Mouy as far as Coconnas, who did not recognize him, and received him at sword's point, entreated mercy on both sides. At this moment, Mercandon perceived him, and knew him, by his white scarf, to be one of the murderers. He fired. La Huriere shrieked, threw up his arms, dropped his arquebuse, and after having vainly attempted to reach the wall, in order to support himself, fell with his face flat on the earth.

De Mouy, profiting by this circumstance, turned down the Rue de Paradis, and disappeared.

Such had been the resistance of the Huguenots, that the De Guise party, quite repulsed, had retired into their hotel, fearing to be besieged and taken in their own habitation.

Coconnas, who, drunk with blood and riot, had reached that degree of excitement when, with the men of the South more especially, courage changes into madness, had not seen or heard anything, was going toward a man lying with his face downward in a pool of blood, and whom he recognized for La Huriere, when the door of the house he had in vain tried to burst in opened, and old Mercandon, followed by his son and two nephews, rushed upon him.

"Here he is! here he is!" cried they all, with one voice.

Coconnas was in the middle of the street, and fearing to be surrounded by these four men who assailed him at once, gave one of those chamois bounds which he had so often practiced in his native mountains, and in an instant found himself with his back against the wall of the Hotel de Guise. Once at ease as to not being surprised from behind, he put himself in a posture of defense, and said, jestingly, "Ah! ah! Daddy Mercandon, don't you know me?"

"Wretch!" cried the old Huguenot. "I know you well; you are engaged against me—me, the friend and companion of your father!"

"And his creditor, are you not?"

"Yes; his creditor, as you say."

"Well, then," said Coconnas, "I have come to settle the account."

"Seize him, bind him!" said Mercandon to the young men who accompanied him, and who at his bidding rushed toward the Piedmontese.

"One moment! one moment!" said Coconnas, laughing, "to seize a man you must have a writ, and you have forgotten that."

And with these words, he crossed his sword with the young man nearest to him, and at the first blow cut his wrist to the bone.

The wounded man retreated, with a shriek of agony.

"That will do for one!" said Coconnas.

At the same moment, the window un-

der which Coconnas had sought shelter opened. He sprang on one side, fearing an attack from behind; but, instead of an enemy, it was a woman he beheld; instead of the enemy's weapon he was prepared to encounter, it was a nosegay that fell at his feet.

"Ah!" he said, "a woman!" He saluted the lady with his sword and stooped to pick up the bouquet.

"Be on your guard, brave Catholic!—be on your guard!" cried the lady.

Coconnas rose, but not before the dagger of the second nephew had pierced his cloak and wounded his other shoulder.

The lady uttered a piercing shriek.

Coconnas thanked her, assured her by a gesture, and then made a pass at the nephew, which he parried; but at the second thrust, his foot slipped in the blood, and Coconnas, springing at him like a tiger-cat, drove his sword through his breast.

"Good! good! brave cavalier!" exclaimed the lady of the Hotel de Guise—"good! I will send you succor."

"Do not give yourself any trouble about that, madame," was Coconnas's reply; "rather look on to the end, if it interests you, and see how the Comte Annibal de Coconnas settles the Huguenots."

At this moment, the son of old Mercandon placed a pistol almost close to Coconnas and fired. The count fell on his knee. The lady at the window shrieked again; but Coconnas rose instantly; he had only knelt to avoid the ball, which struck the wall about two feet beneath where the lady was standing.

Almost at the same moment there issued a cry of rage from the window of Mercandon's house, and an old woman who recognized Coconnas as a Catholic, from his white scarf and cross, threw a flower-pot at him, which struck him above the knee.

"Bravo!" said Coconnas; "one throws me flowers and the other flower-pots."

"Thanks, mother—thanks!" said the young man.

"Go on, wife, go on," said old Mercandon; "but take care of yourself."

"Ah!" said Coconnas, "the women are in arms, then, some for me, and others against me! Mordi! let us end this."

The scene, in fact, was much changed; and evidently drew near its close. Coconnas was wounded in the face, it is true, but in all the vigor of four-and-twenty, used to arms, and irritated rather than weakened by the three or four scratches he had received; while, on the other side, there remained only Mercandon and his son, an old man of sixty or seventy years and a stripling of sixteen or eighteen, pale, fair, and weak, and who, having discharged his pistol, which was consequently useless, was brandishing a sword half the length of that of the Piedmontese. The father, armed only with a dagger and a discharged arquebuse, was calling for help. An old woman, looking out of the window, held a piece of marble in her hand, which she was preparing to hurl down. Coconnas, excited on the one hand by menaces, and on the other by encouragements, proud of his twofold victory, drunken with powder and blood, lighted by the reflection of a house in flames, warmed by the idea that he was fighting under the eyes of a female whose beauty was as superior as he felt assured she was of high rank—Coconnas, like the last of the Horatii, felt his strength redouble, and seeing the young man falter, rushed on him and crossed his small weapon with his terrible and bloody rapier. Two blows sufficed to drive it out of his hands. Then Mercandon tried to drive Coconnas back, so that the projectiles thrown from the window might be sure to strike him, but Coconnas, to paralyze the double attack of the old man, who tried to stab him with his dagger, and the mother of the young man, who was endeavoring to break his skull with the stone she was ready to throw, seized his adversary by the body, presenting him against all the blows, as a buckler, and wellnigh strangling him in his Herculean grasp.

"Help! help!" cried the young man, "he is breaking my breast-bone—help! help!" and his voice grew faint in a low and choking groan.

Then Mercandon ceased to attack, and began to entreat.

"Mercy, mercy! Monsieur de Coconnas, mercy!—he is my only child!"

"He is my son, my son!" cried the mother; "the hope of our old age! Do not kill him, sir—do not kill him!"

"Really," cried Coconnas, bursting into laughter, "not kill him! What did he mean, then, to do with me with his sword and pistol?"

"Sir," said Mercandon, clasping his hands, "I have at home your father's undertaking, I will return it to you—I have ten thousand crowns of gold, I will give them to you—I have the jewels of our family, they shall be yours; but do not kill him!—do not kill him!"

"And I have my love," said the lady in the Hotel de Guise, in a low tone, "and I promise it you."

Coconnas reflected a moment, and said suddenly: "Are you a Huguenot?"

"Yes," murmured the youth.

"Then you must die!" replied Coconnas, frowning, and putting to his adversary's breast his keen and glittering dagger.——"Die!" cried the old man; "my poor child, die!"

And the shriek of the mother resounded so piercingly and loud, that for a moment it shook the firm resolution of the Piedmontese.

"Oh, Madame la Duchesse!" cried the father, turning toward the lady at the Hotel de Guise, "intercede for us, and every morning and evening you shall be remembered in our prayers."

"Then let him be a convert," said the lady.

"I am a Protestant," said the boy.

"Then die!" exclaimed Coconnas, lifting his dagger; "die! since you will not accept the life which that lovely mouth offers to you." Mercandon and his wife saw the blade of that deadly weapon gleam like lightning above the head of their son.

"My son Olivier," shrieked his mother, "abjure, abjure!"

"Abjure, my dear boy!" cried Mercandon, going on his knees to Coconnas; "do not leave us alone on the earth!"

"Abjure all together," said Coconnas; "for one *Credo*, three souls and one life."

"I will!" said the youth.

"We will!" cried Mercandon and his wife.

"On your knees then," said Coconnas. "and let your son repeat after me, word for word, the prayer I shall say."

The father obeyed first.

"I am ready," said the son, also kneeling.

Coconnas then began to repeat in Latin the words of the *Credo*. But whether from chance or calculation, young Olivier knelt close to where his sword had fallen. Scarcely did he see this weapon within his reach, than, not ceasing to repeat the words which Coconnas dictated, he stretched out his hand to take it up. Coconnas watched the movement, although he pretended not to see it; but at the moment when the young man touched the handle of his sword with his fingers, he rushed on him, knocked him over, and plunged his dagger in his throat, exclaiming: "Traitor!"

The youth uttered one cry, raised himself convulsively on his knee, and fell dead.

"Ah, ruffian!" shrieked Mercandon, "you slay us to rob us of the hundred rose nobles you owe us."

"Ma foi! no," said Coconnas, "and here's the proof;" and so saying, he threw at the old man's feet the purse which his father had given him before his departure to pay his creditor.

"And here's your death!" cried the old woman from the window.

"Take care, M. de Coconnas—take care!" called out the lady at the Hotel de Guise.

But before Coconnas could turn his head to comply with this advice, or get out of the way of the threat, a heavy mass came hissing through the air, falling on the hat of the Piedmontese, breaking his sword, and prostrating him on the pavement: he was overcome, crushed, so that he did not hear the double cry of joy and distress which came from the right and left.

Mercandon instantly rushed dagger in hand on Coconnas, bereft of sense; but

at this moment the door of the Hotel de Guise opened, and the old man, seeing swords and partisans gleaming, fled, while the lady he had called the duchess, whose beauty seemed terrible by the light of the flames, all dazzling as she was with gems and diamonds, leaned half out of the window, in order to direct the new comers, her arm extended toward Coconnas.

"There! there! in front of me—a gentleman in a red doublet. There!—that is he—yes, that is he."

CHAPTER X.

DEATH, MASS, OR THE BASTILLE.

MARGUERITE, as we have said, had shut the door, and returned to her chamber. But as she entered, all breathless, she saw Gillonne, who, terror-struck, was leaning against the door of the cabinet, gazing on the traces of blood on the bed, the furniture, and the carpet.

"Oh, madame," she exclaimed, "is he then dead?"

"Silence, Gillonne!" and Gillonne was silent.

Marguerite then took from her gypsire a small gold key, opened the door of the cabinet, and pointed to the young man.

La Mole had succeeded in raising himself, and going toward the window; a small poniard, such as females of the period wore, was in his hand.

"Fear nothing, sir," said Marguerite; "for, on my soul, you are in safety!"

La Mole sank on his knees.

"Oh, madame," he cried, "you are more than a queen—you are a divinity!"

"Do not agitate yourself, sir," said Marguerite, "your blood flows still. Oh, look, Gillonne, how pale he is! Let us see where you are wounded."

"Madame," said La Mole, trying to fix on certain parts of his body the pain which pervaded his whole frame, "I think I have a dagger-thrust in my shoulder, another in my chest—the other wounds are mere trifles."

"We will see," said Marguerite. "Gillonne, bring me my casket with the balms in it."

Gillonne obeyed, and returned, holding in one hand a casket, and in the other a silver basin and some fine Holland linen.

"Help me to rouse him, Gillonne," said Queen Marguerite; "for in attempting to rouse himself the poor gentleman has lost all his strength."

"Oh!" cried La Mole, "I would rather die than see you, the queen, stain your hands with blood as unworthy as mine. Oh, never, never!"

"Your blood, sir," replied Gillonne, with a smile, "has already stained the bed and apartments of her majesty."

Marguerite folded her mantle over her cambric dressing-gown, all bespattered with small red spots.

"Madame," stammered La Mole, "can you not leave me to the care of the surgeon?"

"Of a Catholic surgeon, perhaps," said the queen, with an expression which La Mole comprehended and which made him shudder.

"Come, Gillonne, let us to work!"

La Mole again endeavored to resist, and repeated that he would rather die than occasion the queen labor, which, though begun in pity, must end in disgust; but this exertion completely exhausted his strength, and falling back, he fainted a second time.

Marguerite, then seizing the poniard which he had dropped, quickly cut the lace of his doublet; while Gillonne, with another blade, ripped open the sleeves.

Next, Gillonne, with a cloth dipped in fresh water, stanched the blood which escaped from his shoulder and breast, and Marguerite, with a silver needle with a round point, probed the wounds with all the delicacy and skill that Ambroise Pare could have displayed.

"A dangerous, but not mortal wound, *acerrimum humeri vulnus, non autem lethale*," murmured the lovely and learned lady-surgeon; "hand me the salve, Gillonne, and get the lint ready."

Gillonne had already dried and perfumed the young man's chest and arms, modeled on the antique, as well as his shoulders, which fell gracefully back; his neck shaded by thick hair, and which seemed rather to belong to a statue of Paros,

than the mangled frame of a dying man.

"Poor young man!" murmured Gillonne.

"Is he not handsome?" said Marguerite, with royal frankness.

"Yes, madame; but I think we should lift him on the bed."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "you are right;" and the two women, uniting their strength, raised La Mole, and deposited him on a kind of large sofa in front of the window, which they partly opened.

This movement aroused La Mole, who heaved a sigh; and opening his eyes, began to find that delightful sensation which accompanies every healing application to a wounded man, when, on his return to consciousness, he finds freshness instead of burning heat, and the perfumes of new applications instead of the noisome odor of blood.

He muttered some unconnected words, to which Marguerite replied by a smile, placing her finger on her mouth.

At this moment several blows were struck at the door.

"Some one knocks at the secret passage," said Marguerite; "I will go and see who it is. Do you remain here, and do not leave him for a single moment."

Marguerite went into the chamber, and closing the door of the cabinet, opened that of the passage which led to the king's and queen-mother's apartments.

"Madame de Sauve!" she exclaimed, retreating suddenly, and with an expression which resembled hatred, if not terror: so true it is that a woman never forgives another for carrying off from her even a man whom she does not love; "Madame de Sauve!"

"Yes, your majesty!" she replied, clasping her hands.

"You here, madame?" exclaimed Marguerite, more and more surprised, and at the same time more and more imperative.

Charlotte fell on her knees.

"Madame," she said, "pardon me! I know how guilty I am toward you; but if you knew—the fault is not wholly mine; an express command of the queen-mother—"

"Rise!" said Marguerite, "and as I do not suppose you have come with the intention of justifying yourself to me, tell me why you have come at all?"

"I have come, madame," said Charlotte, still on her knees, and with a look of wild alarm, "I came to ask you if he were not here?"

"Here! who?—of whom are you speaking, madame? for I really do not understand."

"Of the king!"

"Of the king? What, do you follow him to my apartments? You know very well that he never comes hither."

"Ah, madame!" continued the Baroness de Sauve, without replying to these attacks, or even seeming to comprehend them, "ah! would to Heaven he were here!"

"And wherefore?"

"Eh, mon Dieu! madame, because they are murdering the Huguenots, and the king of Navarre is the chief of the Huguenots."

"Oh!" cried Marguerite, seizing Madame de Sauve by the hand and compelling her to rise; "ah! I had forgotten! Besides, I did not think a king could run the same dangers as other men."

"More, madame—a thousand times more!" cried Charlotte.

"In fact, Madame de Lorraine had warned me; I had begged him not to leave the Louvre. Has he done so?"

"No, madame, he is in the Louvre; but if he is not here—"

"He is not here!"

"Oh!" cried Madame de Sauve, with a burst of agony, "then he is a dead man, for the queen-mother has sworn his destruction!"

"His destruction! ah," said Marguerite, "you terrify me—impossible!"

"Madame," replied Madame de Sauve, with that energy which passion alone can give, "I tell you that no one knows where the king of Navarre is."

"And where is the queen-mother?"

"The queen-mother sent me to seek M. de Guise and M. de Tavannes, who were in her oratory, and then dismissed me."

"And my husband has not been in your apartment?" inquired Marguerite.

"He has not, madame. I have sought him everywhere, and asked everybody for him. One soldier told me he thought he had seen him in the midst of the guards who accompanied him, with his sword drawn in his hand, some time before the massacre begun, and the massacre has begun this hour."

"Thanks, madame," said Marguerite; "and although perhaps the sentiment which impels you is an additional offense toward me—yet, again, thanks!"

"Oh, forgive me, madame!" she said, "and I shall return to my apartments more fortified by your pardon, for I dare not follow you, even at a distance."

Marguerite extended her hand to her.

"I will seek Queen Catherine," she said, "and return to you. The king of Navarre is under my safeguard; I have promised him my alliance, and I will be faithful to my promise."

"But suppose you cannot obtain access to the queen-mother, madame?"

"Then I will go to my brother Charles, and I will speak to him."

"Go, madame, go," said Charlotte, "and may God guide your majesty?"

Marguerite passed quickly along the passage, and Madame de Sauve followed her.

The queen of Navarre saw her turn to her own apartment, and then went herself toward the queen's chamber.

All was changed here. Instead of the crowd of eager courtiers, who usually opened their ranks before the queen and respectfully saluted her, Marguerite met only guards with red partisans and garments stained with blood, or gentlemen in torn mantles—their faces blackened with powder, bearing orders and dispatches—some going in, others going out, and all these entrances and exits made a terrible and immense confusion in the galleries.

Marguerite, however, went boldly on until she reached the antechamber of the queen-mother, which was guarded by a double file of soldiers, who only allowed those to enter who had the proper countersign. Marguerite in vain tried to pass this living barrier: several times she saw the door open and shut, and at each time she saw Catherine moving and excited, as if she were only twenty years of age, writing, receiving letters, opening them, addressing a word to one, a smile to another; and those on whom she smiled most graciously, were those who were the most covered with dust and blood.

Without the walls was heard, from time to time, the report of fire-arms.

"I shall never reach him!" said Marguerite, after having made several vain attempts to pass the soldiers.

At this moment M. de Guise passed: he had come to inform the queen of the murder of the admiral, and was returning to the butchery.

"Oh, Henri!" cried Marguerite, "where is the king of Navarre?"

The duke looked at her with a smile of astonishment, bowed, and, without any reply, passed on.

"Ah, my dear Rene," said the queen, recognizing Catherine's perfumer, "is that you?—you have just left my mother. Do you know what has become of my husband?"

"His majesty the king of Navarre is no friend of mine, madame—that you know very well. It is even said," he added, with a horrid smile—"it is even said, that he ventures to accuse me of having been the accomplice, with Queen Catherine, in poisoning his mother."

"No, no!" cried Marguerite, "my good Rene, do not believe that!"

"Oh, it is of little consequence, madame!" said the perfumer; "neither the king of Navarre nor his party are any longer to be feared!"

And he turned his back on Marguerite.

"Ah, Monsieur de Tavannes!" cried Marguerite, "one word, I beseech you!"

Tavannes stopped.

"Where is Henry of Navarre?"

"Ma foi," he replied, in a loud voice, "I believe he is somewhere in the city with the Messieurs d'Alencon and de Conde."

And then he added, in a tone so low that the queen alone could hear:

"Your majesty, if you would see him—to be in whose place I would give my life—go to the king's armory."

"Thanks, Tavannes — thanks!" said Marguerite; "I will go there."

And she went on her way thither, murmuring:

"Oh, after all I promised him—after the way in which he behaved to me when that ingrate, Henri de Guise, was concealed in the closet—I cannot let him perish!"

And she knocked at the door of the king's apartments; but they were begirt within by two companies of guards.

"No one is admitted to the king," said the officer, coming forward.

"But I—" said Marguerite.

"The order is general."

"I, the queen of Navarre!—I, his sister!"

"I dare make no exception, madame."

And the officer closed the door.

"He is lost!" exclaimed Marguerite, alarmed at the sight of all the sinister countenances she had seen. "Yes, yes! I comprehend all. I have been used as a bait. I am the snare which has entrapped the Huguenots: but I will enter, if I should be killed in the attempt!"

And Marguerite ran like a mad creature through the corridors and galleries, when suddenly, while passing by a small door, she heard a low chanting, almost as melancholy as it was monotonous. It was a Calvinistic psalm, sung by a trembling voice in an adjacent chamber.

"The nurse of my brother the king—the good Madelon—it is she!" exclaimed Marguerite. "God of the Christians, aid me now!"

And, full of hope, Marguerite knocked at the little door.

Soon after the counsel which Marguerite had conveyed to him, after his conversation with Rene, and after quitting the queen-mother's chamber, poor Phœbe, like a good genius, opposing, Henry of Navarre had met some worthy Catholic gentlemen, who, under a pretext of doing him honor, had escorted him to his apartments, where a score of Huguenots awaited him, who had rallied round the young prince, and, having once rallied, would not leave him — so strongly, for some hours, had the presentiment of that night weighed on the Louvre. They had remained there, without any one attempting to disturb them. At last, at the first stroke of the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, which resounded through all hearts like a funeral knell, Tavannes entered, and, in the midst of a deathlike silence, announced that King Charles IX. desired to speak to Henry.

It was useless to attempt resistance, and no one thought of it. They had heard the ceilings, galleries and corridors crack beneath the feet of the assembled soldiers, who were in the courtyards, as well as in the apartments, to the number of two thousand. Henry, after having taken leave of his friends, whom he might never again see, followed Tavannes, who led him to a small gallery contiguous to the king's apartments, where he left him alone, unarmed, and a prey to mistrust.

The king of Navarre counted here alone, minute by minute, two mortal hours; listening, with increasing alarm, to the sound of the tocsin and the discharge of fire-arms; seeing through a small window, by the light of the flames and flambeaux, the victims and their assassins pass; understanding nothing of these shrieks of murder—these cries of distress — not even suspecting, in spite of his knowledge of Charles IX., the queen-mother, and the Duke de Guise, the horrible drama at this moment enacting.

Henry had not physical courage, but he had better than that—he had moral fortitude. Fearing danger, he yet smiled at and faced it; but it was danger in the field of battle—danger in the open air—danger in the eyes of all, and attended by the noisy harmony of trumpets and the loud and vibrating beat of drums—but now he was without arms, shut up, immured in obscurity which was scarcely sufficient to enable him to see the enemy who might glide toward him, and the weapon that might be raised to strike him.

These two hours were, perhaps, the most agonizing of his life.

In the hottest of the tumult, and as Henry was beginning to comprehend that, in all probability, this was some

organized massacre, a captain came to him, desiring the prince to follow him to the king. As they approached, the door opened, and closed when they entered. The captain then led Henry to the king, who was in his armory. When they entered, the king was seated in an arm-chair, his two hands placed on the two arms of the seat, and his head falling on his bosom. As they entered, Charles looked up, and on his brow Henry observed the perspiration dropping from it like large beads.

"Good-evening, Harry," said the king, roughly. "La Chastre, leave us."

The captain retired, and a profound silence ensued. Henry looked around him with uneasiness, and saw that he was alone with the king. Charles suddenly arose.

"Mordieu!" said he, passing his hands through his light brown hair, and wiping his brow at the same time, "you are glad to be with me, are you not, Harry?"

"Certainly, sire," replied the king of Navarre, "I am always happy to be with your majesty."

"Happier than if you were down there, eh?" continued Charles, following his own thoughts, rather than replying to Henry's compliment.

"I do not understand, sire," replied Henry.

"Look out, then, and you will soon understand."

And with a quick gesture, Charles moved, or rather sprung toward the window, and drawing his brother-in-law toward him, who became more and more alarmed, he pointed to him the horrible outlines of the assassins, who, on the deck of a boat, were cutting the throats or drowning the victims brought them at every moment.

"In the name of Heaven!" cried Henry, "what is going on to-night?"

"To-night, sir," replied Charles IX., "they are ridding me of all the Huguenots. Look down there, over the Hotel de Bourbon, at the smoke and flames: they are the smoke and flames of the admiral's house, which has been fired. Do you see that body, which these good Catholics are drawing on a torn mattress—it is the corpse of the admiral's son-in-law—the carcass of your friend, Teligny."

"What means this?" cried the king of Navarre, seeking vainly by his side for the hilt of his dagger, and trembling equally with shame and anger; for he felt that he was, at the same time, laughed at and menaced.

"It means," cried Charles IX., furious, and turning pale with intense rage, "that I will no longer have any Huguenots about me. Do you hear me, Henry?—Am I king? am I master?"

"Your majesty—"

"My majesty kills and massacres at this moment all that is not Catholic, at my pleasure. Are you Catholic?" exclaimed Charles, whose anger rose like an excited sea.

"Sire," replied Henry, "do you remember your own words, 'What matters the religion of those who serve me well!'"

"Ah! ah! ah!" cried Charles, bursting into a ferocious laugh; "you ask me if I remember my words, Henry! *'Verba volant,'* as my sister Margot says; and had not all those"—and he pointed to the city with his finger—"served me well, also? Were they not brave in battle, wise in council, deeply devoted? They were all useful subjects—but they were Huguenots, and I want none but Catholics."

Henry remained silent.

"Well! do you understand me now, Harry?" asked Charles.

"I understand, sire."

"Well?"

"Well, sire! I do not see why the king of Navarre should not do what so many gentlemen and poor folk have done. For if they all die, poor unfortunates, it is because the same terms have been proposed to them which your majesty proposes to me, and they have refused, as I refuse."

Charles seized the arm of the young prince, and fixed on him a look whose vacancy suddenly changed into a fierce and savage scowl.

"What!" he said, "do you believe that I have taken the trouble to offer the

alternative of the mass to those whose throats are being cut down there?"

"Sire," said Henry, disengaging his arm, "will you not die in the religion of your fathers?"

"Yes, mordieu! and thou?"

"Well, sire, I will do the same!" replied Henry.

Charles uttered a cry of fierce rage, and seized with trembling hand his arquebuse placed on the table. Henry, who, leaning against the tapestry, with the perspiration streaming from his brow, was yet, owing to his presence of mind, calm to all appearance, followed with the anxious amaze of a bird fascinated by a serpent every movement of the terrible king.

Charles cocked his arquebuse, and striking his foot with blind rage, cried, as he dazzled Henry's eyes with the polished barrel of the brandished weapon, "Will you accept the mass?"

Henry remained mute.

Charles IX. shook the vaults of the Louvre with the most terrible oath that ever issued from the lips of man, and grew more livid than before.

"Death, mass, or the Bastille!" he cried, taking aim at the king of Navarre.

"Oh, sire!" exclaimed Henry, "will you kill me—me, your brother-in-law?"

Henry thus eluded, by his imcomparable presence of mind, which was one of the strongest faculties of his organization, the answer which the king demanded, for doubtless had this reply been in the negative, Henry had been a dead man.

As immediately after the last paroxysms of rage, there is always the commencement of reaction, Charles IX. did not repeat the question he had addressed to the prince of Navarre; and, after a moment's hesitation, during which he uttered a hoarse kind of growl, he turned toward the open window, and aimed at a man who was running along the quay in front.

"I must kill some one!" cried Charles IX., ghastly as a corpse, his eyes injected with blood; and firing as he spoke, he struck the man who was running.

Henry uttered a groan.

Then, animated by a frightful ardor, Charles loaded and fired his arquebuse without cessation, uttering cries of joy every time his aim was successful.

"It is all over with me!" said the king of Navarre to himself; "when he sees no one else to kill, he will kill me!"

"Well!" said a voice behind the princes, suddenly, "is it done?"

It was Catherine de Medicis, who had entered as the king fired his last shot.

"No, thousand thunders!" said the king, throwing his arquebuse on the floor. "No, the obstinate blockhead will not consent!"

Catherine made no reply. She turned slowly toward the part of the chamber in which Henry was, as motionless as one of the figures of the tapestry against which he was leaning. She then gave a glance to the king, which seemed to say:

"Then, why is he alive?"

"He lives, he lives!" murmured Charles IX., who perfectly understood the glance, and replied to it without hesitation—"he lives, because he is my relative."

Catherine smiled.

Henry saw the smile, and felt then assured that it was with Catherine he must struggle.

"Madame," he said to her, "all comes from you, I see very well, and nothing from my brother-in-law, Charles. You have laid the plan for drawing me into a snare. It was you who made your daughter the bait which was to destroy us all. It has been you who has separated me from my wife, that she might not see me killed before her eyes."

"Yes, but that shall not be!" cried another voice, breathless and impassioned, which Henry recognized in an instant, and made Charles start with surprise, and Catherine with rage.

"Marguerite!" exclaimed Henry.

"Margot!" said Charles IX.

"My daughter!" muttered Catherine.

"Sir," said Marguerite to Henry, "your last words were an accusation against me, and you were both right and wrong. Right, for I am the means by which they attempted to destroy you: wrong, for I did not know that you were going toward destruction. I myself, sir, owe my life to chance—to my mother's not thinking of

me, perhaps; but as soon as I learned your danger I remembered my duty, and a wife's duty is to share the fortunes of her husband. If you are exiled, sir, I will be exiled too; if they imprison you, I will be your fellow-captive; if they kill you, I will also die."

And she extended her hand to her husband, which he eagerly seized, if not with love, at least with gratitude.

"Oh, my poor Margot!" said Charles, "you had much better desire him to become a Catholic!"

"Sire," replied Marguerite, with that lofty dignity which was so natural to her, "for your own sake, do not ask any prince of your house to commit a base action."

Catherine darted a significant glance at Charles.

"Brother," cried Marguerite, who, as well as Charles IX., understood the terrible dumb-show of Catherine, "remember, you made him my husband!"

Charles was for a time stupefied between the imperative look of Catherine and the supplicating regard of Marguerite, but after a pause he said in a whisper to Catherine:

"Faith, madame, Margot is right, and Harry is my brother-in-law."

"Yes," was Catherine's reply, in a similar whisper to her son; "yes, but if he were not—"

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAWTHORN OF THE CEMETERY OF THE INNOCENTS.

WHEN she had reached her own apartments, Marguerite vainly endeavored to divine the words which Catherine de Medicis had whispered to Charles IX., and which had cut short the terrible interview on which hung life and death.

A part of the morning was employed by her in attending to La Mole, and the other in trying to guess the enigma, which her mind could not discover.

The king of Navarre remained a prisoner in the Louvre, while the pursuit of the Huguenots was hotter than ever. To the terrible night had succeeded a day of massacre still more horrible. It was no longer the tocsin and bells that sounded, but the *Te Deum*, and the echoes of this joyous anthem, resounding in the midst of fire and slaughter, were perhaps more sad by the light of the sun than had been the knell of the previous night sounding in darkness. This was not all. Strange to say, a hawthorn-tree, which had blossomed in the spring, and which, according to custom, had lost its odorous flowers in the month of June, had reblossomed during the night, and the Catholics, who saw in this even a miracle, and who by rendering this miracle popular made the Deity their accomplice, went in procession, cross and banner at their head, to the Cemetery of the Innocents, where this hawthorn was blooming. This kind of assent from Heaven had redoubled the efforts of the assassins, and while the city continued to present in each street and thoroughfare a scene of desolation, the Louvre had become the common tomb for all Protestants who had been shut up there when the signal was given. The king of Navarre, the Prince de Conde, and La Mole, were the only survivors.

Assured as to La Mole, whose wounds were progressing well, Marguerite was occupied now with one sole idea, which was to save her husband's life, so pertinaciously threatened. No doubt, the first sentiment which actuated the wife was one of generous pity for a man for whom, as for the Béarnais, she had sworn, if not love, at least alliance; but there was, beside, another less pure sentiment which had penetrated the queen's heart.

Marguerite was ambitious and had foreseen almost the certainty of royalty in her marriage with Henry de Bourbon, and if she lost him, it was not only a husband, but a throne she lost.

While wrapped in her reflections, she heard a knock at the secret door. She started; for three persons only came by that door—the king, the queen-mother, and the Duke d'Alencon. She half opened the door of the cabinet, made a gesture of silence to Gillonne and La Mole, and then opened the door to her visitor.

It was the Duke d'Alencon. The young prince had disappeared since the evening.

For a moment, Marguerite had had the idea of claiming his intercession for the king of Navarre, but a terrible idea restrained her. The marriage had taken place contrary to his wishes. Francois detested Henry, and had only evinced his neutrality toward the Béarnais, because he was convinced that Henry and his wife had remained strangers to each other. Marguerite therefore shuddered at perceiving the young prince more than she had shuddered at seeing the king, or even the queen-mother. D'Alencon was attired with his usual elegance. His clothes and linen gave forth those perfumes which Charles IX. despised, but of which the Dukes d'Anjou and d'Alencon made continual use.

On his entrance he pressed his pale thin lips against the forehead of his sister. Then, sitting down, he began to relate to his sister the bloody particulars of the night: the lingering and terrible death of the admiral, the instantaneous death of Teligny, pierced by a ball. He paused and emphasized all the more horrid details of this night, with that love of blood peculiar to himself and his two brothers; and Marguerite did not interrupt him until he had finished.

"It was not to tell me this only," she then said, "that you came hither, brother?"

The Duke d'Alencon smiled.

"You have something else to say to me?"

"No," replied the duke; "I am waiting."

"Waiting! for what?"

"Did you not tell me, dearest Marguerite," said the duke, drawing his chair close up to that of his sister, "that this marriage with the king of Navarre was contracted against your will?"

"Yes, no doubt. I did not know the prince of Béarn, when he was proposed to me as a husband."

"And after you knew him, did you not say that you experienced no love for him?"

"I said so, and it is true."

"Was it not your opinion that this marriage would make you miserable?"

"My dear Francois," said Marguerite, "when a marriage is not extremely happy, it is always excessively miserable."

"Well, then, my dear Marguerite, as I said to you—I am waiting."

"But for what are you waiting?"

"Until you display your joy!"

"What have I to be joyful for?"

"The unexpected occasion which offers itself for you to resume your liberty."

"My liberty?" replied Marguerite, who was resolved on allowing the prince to disclose all his thoughts.

"Yes; your liberty! You will now be separated from the king of Navarre."

"Separated!" said Marguerite, fastening her eyes on the young prince.

The Duke d'Alencon tried to sustain his sister's look, but his eyes soon sunk with embarrassment.

"Separated!" repeated Marguerite; "and how, brother? for I should like to comprehend all you mean, and by what method you propose to separate us?"

"Why," murmured the duke, "Henry is a Huguenot."

"No doubt; but he made no mystery of his religion, and they knew that when we were married."

"Yes; but since your marriage, sister," asked the duke, allowing, in spite of himself, a ray of joy to illumine his countenance; "what has been Henry's behavior?"

"Why, you know better than any one, Francois, for he has passed his days almost perpetually in your society, sometimes at the chase, sometimes at mall, sometimes at tennis."

"Yes, his days, no doubt," replied the duke; "his days—but his nights?"

Marguerite was silent; it was now her turn to cast down her eyes.

"His nights," repeated the Duke d'Alencon, "his nights?"

"Well?" inquired Marguerite, feeling that it was requisite that she should say something in reply.

"Well, he passes them with Madame de Sauve!"

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"I know it, because I had an interest in knowing it," replied the young prince, picking the embroidery of his sleeves.

Marguerite began to understand what Catherine had whispered to Charles, but affected to remain in ignorance.

"Why do you tell me this, brother?" she replied, with a well-affected air of melancholy; "was it for the sake of recalling to me that no one here loves me or clings to me, not even those whom nature has given to me as protectors, whom the Church has given me as my spouse?"

"You are unjust," said the Duke d'Alencon, drawing his chair still nearer to his sister, "I love you and protect you!"

"Brother," said Marguerite, looking steadfastly at him, "have you anything to say to me on the part of the queen-mother?"

"I! you mistake, sister. I swear to you—what can make you think that?"

"What can make me think that?—why, because you break the intimacy that binds you to my husband, you abandon the cause of the king of Navarre—an alliance with whom—"

"Has now become impossible, sister," interrupted the Duke d'Alencon.

"And wherefore?"

"Because the king has designs on your husband, and our mother has seen through them all. I allied myself to the Huguenots, because I believed the Huguenots were in favor; but now they kill the Huguenots, and in another week there will not remain fifty in the whole kingdom. I held out my hand to the king of Navarre because he was your husband; but now he is not your husband, what can you say to that—you, who are not only the loveliest woman in France, but have the clearest head in the kingdom?"

"Why, I have to say," replied Marguerite, "that I know our brother Charles; I saw him yesterday in one of those fits of frenzy, every one of which shortens his life ten years. I have to say that these attacks are, unfortunately, very frequent, and that thus, in all probability, our brother Charles has not very long to live; and, finally, I have to say that the king of Poland is just dead, and the question of electing a prince of the house of France in his stead is much discussed; and when circumstances are thus, it is not the moment to abandon allies, who, in the moment of struggle, might support us with the strength of a nation and the power of a kingdom."

"And you!" exclaimed the duke, "do you not act much more treasonably to me in preferring a stranger to your own house?"

"Explain yourself, Francois!—in what have I acted treasonably to you?"

"You yesterday begged the life of the king of Navarre from King Charles."

"Well?" said Marguerite.

The duke rose hastily, paced round the chamber twice or thrice with a bewildered air.

"Adieu, sister!" he said at last. "You would not understand me; do not, therefore, complain of whatever may happen to you."

Marguerite turned pale, but remained fixed in her place. She saw the Duke d'Alencon go away, without making any attempt to detain him; but scarcely had he entered the corridor than he returned.

"Sister Marguerite," he said, "I had forgotten one thing; that is, that tomorrow, at a certain hour, the king of Navarre will be dead."

Marguerite uttered a cry, for the idea that she was the instrument of assassination caused in her a fear she could not subdue.

"And you will not prevent this death," she said; "you will not save your best and most faithful ally?"

"Since yesterday, the king of Navarre is no longer my ally."

"Then who is?"

"M. de Guise. By destroying the Huguenots, M. de Guise has become the king of the Catholics."

"And is it a son of Henry II. who recognizes as his king a duke of Lorraine?"

"You will not see things in a right light, Marguerite."

"I confess that I seek in vain to read your thoughts."

"Sister, you are of as good a house as the Princess de Porcian; De Guise is no

more immortal than the king of Navarre. Well, Marguerite, suppose that Monsieur is elected king of Poland; well, I am king of France, and you, my sister, shall reign with me, and be queen of the Catholics." Marguerite was overwhelmed at the depth of the views of this youth, whom no one at court even thought possessed of common understanding.

"There is only one thing which can prevent this capital plan from succeeding, brother," said she, rising as she spoke.

"And what is that?"

"That I do not love the Duke de Guise."

"And whom, then, do you love?"

"No one."

D'Alencon looked at Marguerite with the astonishment of a man, who, in his turn, does not comprehend, and left the apartment, pressing his cold hand on his forehead, which ached to bursting. Marguerite was alone and thoughtful, when Queen Catherine sent to know if she would accompany her in a pilgrimage to the hawthorn of the Cemetery of the Innocents.

She sent word, that if they would prepare a horse, she would most readily accompany their majesties.

A few minutes after, the page came to tell her that all was ready; and, after a sign to Gillonne to take care of La Mole, she went forth.

The king, the queen-mother, Tavannes, and the principal Catholics, were already mounted. Marguerite cast a rapid glance over the group, which was composed of twenty persons nearly, but the king of Navarre was not of the party.

Madame de Sauve was there, and she exchanged a glance with her, which convinced the queen of Navarre that her husband's mistress had something to tell her.

As they proceeded, the people shouted and cried, "Vive la roi! Vive la messe! Mort aux Huguenots!"

When they reached the top of the Rue des Prouvelles, they met some men who were dragging a carcass without a head. It was that of the admiral. The men were going to hang it by the feet at Montfaucon.

They entered the Cemetery of Saint Innocents, and the clergy, forewarned of the visit of the king and the queen-mother, awaited their majesties to harangue them.

Madame de Sauve profited by a moment when Catherine was listening to the discourse that was being made, to approach the queen of Navarre, and beg leave to kiss her hand. Marguerite extended her arm toward her, and Madame de Sauve, as she kissed the queen's hand, secretly put a small piece of paper up her sleeve.

Quick and well managed as was Madame de Sauve's proceeding, yet Cathorine perceived it, and turned round at the moment when the maid of honor was kissing Marguerite's hand.

The two women saw that look, which penetrated them like lightning, but both remained unmoved; only Madame de Sauve left Marguerite, and resumed her place near Catherine.

When the address was finished, Catherine made a gesture, smilingly, to the queen of Navarre, who went toward her.

"Eh, my daughter," said the queen-mother, in her Italian patois, "are you, then, on such intimate terms with Madame de Sauve?"

Marguerite smiled in turn, and gave to her lovely countenance the bitterest expression she could, as she said:

"Yes, mother; the serpent came to bite my hand!"

"Ah, ah!" replied Catherine, with a smile, "you are jealous, I think!"

"You mistake, madame," replied Marguerite; "I am no more jealous of the king of Navarre than the king of Navarre is jealous of me, only I know how to distinguish my friends from my enemies. I like those who like me, and detest those who hate me. If not, madame, should I be your daughter?"

Catherine smiled so as to make Marguerite understand, that, if she had had any suspicion, it had vanished.

At this moment arrived other pilgrims. The Duke de Guise came with a troop of gentlemen all warm still with recent carnage. They escorted a litter, richly covered with tapestry, which stopped in front of the king.

"The Duchesse de Nevers!" cried Charles IX., "let that lovely and pure Catholic come and receive our compliments. Why, they tell me, cousin, that from your window you made war on the Huguenots, and killed one with a stone."

The Duchesse de Nevers blushed exceedingly.

"Sire," she said, in a low tone, and kneeling before the king, "it was, on the contrary, a wounded Catholic, whom I had the good fortune to rescue."

"Good—good, my cousin! there are two ways of serving me."

During this time the people again cried, "Vive le roi! Vive le Duc de Guise! Vive la messe!"

"Do you return to the Louvre with us, Henriette?" inquired the queen-mother of the lovely duchess.

Marguerite touched her friend on the elbow, who, understanding the sign, replied:

"No, madame, unless your majesty desire it; for I have business in the city with her majesty the queen of Navarre."

"And what are you going to do together?" inquired Catherine.

"To see some very rare and curious Greek books found at an old Protestant pastor's, and which have been taken to the Tower of Saint Jacques la Boucherie," replied Marguerite.

"You would do much better to see the last Huguenot flung from the top of Pont-aux-Meuniers into the Seine," said Charles IX.; "that is the place for all good Frenchmen."

"We will go, if it be your majesty's desire," replied the Duchesse de Nevers.

Catherine cast a look of distrust on the two young women. Marguerite, on the watch, remarked it, and turning herself round uneasily, looked about her.

This assumed or real disquietude did not escape Catherine.

"What are you looking for?"

"I am seeking—I do not see—" she replied.

"Whom are you seeking?"

"Madame de Sauve," said Marguerite; "she must have returned to the Louvre."

"Did I not say you were jealous!" said Catherine, in her daughter's ear. "Oh, *bestia!* Come, come, Henriette," she added, "begone, and take the queen of Navarre with you."

Marguerite pretended to look still about her; then, turning toward her friend, she said, in a whisper:

"Take me away quickly; I have matters of great importance to say to you."

The duchess saluted the king and queen-mother respectfully, and then, inclining before the queen of Navarre:

"Will your majesty condescend to come into my litter?"

"Willingly, only you will have to take me back to the Louvre."

"My litter, like my servants and myself, are at your majesty's orders."

Queen Marguerite entered the litter, while Catherine and her gentlemen returned to the Louvre, and, during the route, she spoke incessantly to the king, pointing several times to Madame de Sauve; and at each time the king laughed—as Charles IX. did laugh—that is, with a laugh more sinister than a threat.

As to Marguerite, as soon as she felt the litter in motion, and had no longer to fear the searching gaze of Catherine, she quickly drew from her sleeve the note of Madame de Sauve, and read as follows:

"I have received orders to send to-night to the king of Navarre two keys; one is that of the chamber in which he is shut up, and the other is the key of my chamber; when once in my apartment, I am enjoined to keep him there until six o'clock in the morning.

"Let your majesty reflect—let your majesty decide. Let your majesty esteem my life as nothing."

"There is now no doubt," murmured Marguerite; "and the poor woman is the tool of which they wish to make use to destroy us all. But we will see if the Queen Margot, as my brother Charles calls me, is so easily to be made a nun of."

"And what is that letter about?" inquired the Duchesse de Nevers.

"Ah! duchesse, I have so many things to say to you!" replied Marguerite, tear-

ing the note into a thousand bits, and scattering them to the winds.

CHAPTER XII.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCE.

"AND, first, where are we going?" asked Marguerite; "not to the Pont des Meuniers, I suppose—I have seen enough slaughter since yesterday."

"I have taken the liberty to conduct your majesty—"

"First and foremost, my majesty requests you to forget my majesty; you were taking me—"

"To the Hotel de Guise, unless you decide otherwise."

"No, no, let us go there, Henriette; the duke and your husband are not there."

"Oh, no," cried the duchess, her bright eyes sparkling with joy; "no: neither my husband, my brother-in-law, nor any one else. I am free—free as air—free as a bird; free, my queen! Do you understand the happiness in that word?—free! I come, I go, I command. Ah, poor queen, you are not free—you sigh."

"You come, you go, you command. Is that all? Is that all the use of liberty?"

"Your majesty promised me that you would begin our mutual confidence."

"Again, 'your majesty!' I shall be angry soon, Henriette. Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"No; your respectful servant in public—in private, your madcap confidante. Is it not so, Marguerite?"

"Yes, yes," said the queen, smiling.

"No family rivalry, no treachery in love; all fair and open. An offensive and defensive alliance, for the sole purpose of seeking, and, if we can, seizing, that ephemeral thing called happiness."

"Just so, duchesse. Let us again seal the compact with a kiss."

And the two beautiful women, the one so roseate, so fair, so animated, the other so pale, so full of melancholy, united their lips as they had united their thoughts.

"What is there new?" asked the duchess, fixing her eyes upon Marguerite.

"Everything is new since the last two days, is it not?"

"Oh, I am speaking of love, not of politics. When we are as old as your mother Catherine, we will think of politics, but at twenty, let us think of something else. Tell me, are you *really* married?"

"To whom?"

"Ah, you reassure me."

"Well, Henriette, that which reassures you alarms me. Duchesse, I must be married."

"When?"——"To-morrow."

"Oh, pauvre Marguerite? and is it essential?"

"Absolutely."

"Mordi! as an acquaintance of mine says, this is very sad."

"You know some one who says mordi?" asked Marguerite, with a smile.

"Yes."

"And who is this acquaintance?"

"You ask questions instead of answering them. Finish your story, and then I will begin."

"In two words, it is this. The king of Navarre is in love, and not with me; I am not in love, and certainly not with him; yet we must both of us change, or seem to change, before to-morrow."

"Well, do you change, and he will soon do the same."

"That is quite impossible, for I am less than ever inclined to change."

"Only with respect to your husband, I hope."

"Henriette, I have a scruple."

"A scruple! about what?"

"Of religion. Do you make any difference between Huguenots and Catholics?"

"In politics?"—"Yes."

"Of course."—"And in love?"

"Ma chere! we women are such heathens, that we admit every kind of sect, and recognize many gods."

"In one, eh?"

"Yes," replied the duchess, her eyes sparkling; "he who is called *Eros*, *Cupido*, *Amor*. He who has a quiver on his back, wings on his shoulders, and a bandage over his eyes. *Mordi, vive la devotion!*"

"You have a peculiar method of praying; you throw stones on the Huguenots."

"Let them talk. Ah, Marguerite! how the finest ideas, the noblest actions, are spoiled in passing through the mouths of the vulgar."

"The vulgar! why, it was my brother Charles who congratulated you on your exploits."

"Your brother Charles is a mighty hunter, who blows the horn all day, which makes him very thin. I reject his compliments; besides, I gave him his answer. Did you hear what I said?"

"No; you spoke so low."

"So much the better. I shall have more news to tell you. Now, then, finish your story, Marguerite."

"Why—why—"

"Well."

"Why, in truth," said the queen, laughing, "if the stone my brother spoke of be a fact, I should not care to tell you my story at all."

"Ah!" cried Henriette, "you have chosen a Huguenot. Well, to reassure your conscience, I promise you to choose one myself on the first opportunity."

"Ah, you have chosen a Catholic, then."

"Mordi!" replied the duchess.

"I see, I see."

"And what is this Huguenot of yours?"

"I have not adopted him. He is nothing, and probably never will be anything to me."

"But what sort is he? You can tell me that; you know how curious I am about these matters."

"A poor young fellow, beautiful as Benvenuto Cellini's Nisus—and who took refuge in my apartment."

"Oh, oh!—of course, without any suggestion on your part?"

"Do not laugh, Henriette; at this very moment he is between life and death."

"He is ill, then?"

"He is dangerously wounded."

"A wounded Huguenot is very disagreeable, especially in these times; and what have you done with this wounded Huguenot, who is not, and never will be, anything to you?"

"He is hid in my cabinet: I would save him."

"He is young, handsome, and wounded—you hide him and wish to save him. He will be very ungrateful if he do not show himself very grateful."

"He is, already, I fear, more grateful than I could wish."

"And this poor young man interests you?"

"Only for humanity's sake."

"Ah! humanity's precisely the virtue that undoes all us women."

"Yes; and you see the king, the Duke d'Alencon, my mother, or even my husband, may at any moment enter the apartment—"

"Ay, you want me to hide your Huguenot so long as he is ill, upon condition I send him back to you when he is cured?"

"No," said Marguerite, "I do not look forward so far; but if you could conceal the poor fellow—if you could preserve the life I have saved, I should be most grateful. You are free at the Hotel de Guise; you have no one to watch you; besides, behind your chamber there is a cabinet like mine, into which no one is entitled to enter; lend me this cabinet for my Huguenot, and when he is cured, open the cage, and let the bird fly away."

"There is only one difficulty, my dear; the cage is already occupied."

"What, have *you* also saved somebody?"

"That is exactly what I answered your brother with."

"Ah, ah! that's why you spoke so low that I could not hear you."

"Listen, Marguerite: the story is no less poetical and romantic than yours. After I had left you six of my guards, I returned with the rest to the Hotel de Guise. I was looking at a house that was burning opposite, when I heard the voices of men swearing and of women crying. I went out on the balcony, and saw, in the thickest of the fight, a complete hero—I like heroes—an Ajax-Telamon; I stood trembling at every blow aimed at him, and at every thrust he dealt, until, all of a sudden, my hero disappeared."

"How?"

"Struck down by a stone an old woman threw at him. Then, like the son of Crœsus, I found my voice, and screamed,

'Help! help!' My guards went out, lifted him up, and bore him to my apartment."

"Alas! I can the better understand this history that it is so nearly my own."

"With this difference, that as I have served the king and the Catholic religion in succoring him, I have no reason to send M. Annibal de Coconnas away."

"His name is Annibal de Coconnas!" said Marguerite, laughing.

"A terrible name, is it not? Well, he who bears it is worthy of it. Put on your mask, for we are now at the hotel."

"Why put on my mask?"

"Because I wish to show you my hero."

"Is he handsome?"

"He seemed so to me during the conflict. In the morning, I must confess he did not look quite so well as at night, by the light of the flames. But I do not think you will find great fault with him."

"Then my protégé is rejected at the Hotel de Guise; I am sorry for it, for that is the last place that they would look for a Huguenot in."

"Oh, no; your Huguenot shall come; he shall have one corner of the cabinet, and Annibal the other."

"But when they recognize each other they will fight."

"Oh, there is no danger. M. de Coconnas has had a cut down the face that prevents him from seeing very well; your Huguenot is wounded in the chest; and, besides, you have only to tell him to be silent on the subject of religion, and all will go well."

"So be it."

"It's a bargain: and now let us go in."

"Thanks," said Marguerite, pressing her friend's hand.

"Here, madame," said the duchess, "you are again 'your majesty;' suffer me, then, to do the honors of the Hotel de Guise fittingly for the queen of Navarre."

And the duchess, descending from the litter, almost bent her knee as she aided Marguerite to alight; then pointing to the gate guarded by two soldiers, arquebuse in hand, she followed the queen respectfully into the hotel.

Arrived at her chamber, the duchess closed the door, and, calling to her waiting-woman, a thorough Sicilian, said to her in Italian, "How is M. le Comte?"

"Better and better," replied she.

"What is he doing?"

"At this moment, madame, he is taking some refreshment."

"It is always a good sign," said Marguerite, "when the appetite returns."

"Ah, I forgot you were a pupil of Ambroise Pare. Leave us, Mica."

"Why do you send her away?"

"That she may be on the watch."

"Now," said the duchess, "will you go in to see him, or shall I send for him here?"

"Neither the one nor the other. I wish to see him without his seeing me."

"What matters it? You have your mask."

"He may recognize me by my hands, my hair, my ring."

"How cautious we are, since we've been married!"

Marguerite smiled.

"Well," said the duchess, "I see only one way."

"What is that?"

"To look through the keyhole."

"Take me to the door, then."

The duchess led Marguerite to a door covered with tapestry; raising this, she applied her eye to the keyhole.

"'Tis as you could wish; he is sitting at table, with his face turned toward us."

The queen took her friend's place; Coconnas was, as the duchess had said, sitting at a table well covered, and, despite his wounds, was doing ample justice to the good things before him.

"Ah, mon Dieu!" cried Marguerite.

"What is the matter?" asked the duchess.

"Impossible!—no!—yes!—'tis he himself!"

"Who?"

"Chut," said Marguerite; "'tis he who pursued my Huguenot into my apartment, and would have killed him in my arms! Oh, Henriette, how fortunate he did not see me."

"Well, then, you have seen him in battle; is he not handsome."

"I do not know," said Marguerite, "for I was looking at him he pursued."

"What is his name?"

"You will not mention it before the count?"

"No."——"Lerac de la Mole."

"And now what do you think of my Annibal?"

"Of La Mole?"——"Of Coconnas?"

"Ma foi!" said Marguerite, "I confess I think—" She stopped.

"Come, come," said the duchess, "I see you cannot forgive his wounding your Huguenot."

"Why, so far," said Marguerite, smiling, "my Huguenot owes him nothing; the cut he gave him on his face—"

"They are quits, then, and we can reconcile them. Send me your wounded man."

"Not now—by-and-by."

"When?"

"When you have found yours a fresh chamber."

"Which?"

Marguerite looked meaningly at her friend, who, after a moment's silence, laughed.

"So be it," said the duchess; "alliance firmer than ever."

"Friendship ever sincere!"

"And the word, in case we need each other?"

"The triple name of your triple god, '*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*'"

And the two princesses separated after one more embrace, and pressing each other's hand for the twentieth time.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THERE ARE KEYS THAT OPEN DOORS THEY ARE NOT MEANT FOR.

THE queen of Navarre, on her return to the Louvre, found Gillonne in great excitement. Madame de Sauve had come in her absence. She had brought a key sent her by the queen-mother. It was the key of the chamber in which Henry was confined. It was evident that the queen-mother wished the Béarnais to pass the night in Madame de Sauve's apartment.

Marguerite took the key, and turned it and turned it; she made Gillonne repeat Madame de Sauve's every word, weighed them, letter by letter, and at length thought she detected Catherine's plan.

She took pen and ink, and wrote:

"Instead of going to Madame de Sauve to-night, come to the queen of Navarre. —MARGUERITE."

She rolled up the paper, put it in the pipe of the key and ordered Gillonne, as soon as it was dark, to slip the key under the king's door.

This done, Marguerite thought of the wounded man, closed all the doors, entered the cabinet, and to her great surprise, found La Mole dressed in all his clothes, torn and blood-stained as they were.

On seeing her he strove to rise, but could not stand, and fell back upon the sofa which had served for his bed.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Marguerite; "and why do you thus disobey the orders of your physician? I recommended you repose, and instead of following my advice you do just the contrary."

"Oh, madame," said Gillonne, "it is not my fault: I have entreated M. le Comte not to commit this folly, but he declares that nothing shall keep him any longer at the Louvre."

"Quit the Louvre!" said Marguerite, astonished. "Why, it is impossible—you can scarcely stand; you are pale and weak: your knees tremble. Only a few hours ago, the wound in your shoulder still bled."

"Madame," said the young man, "as earnestly as I thanked your majesty for having saved my life, as earnestly do I pray you to suffer me to depart."

"I scarcely know what to call such a resolution," said Marguerite; "it is worse than ingratitude."

"Oh!" cried La Mole, clasping his hands, "think me not ungrateful; my gratitude will cease only with my life."

"It will not last long, then," said Marguerite, moved at these words, the sincerity of which it was impossible to doubt; "for your wounds will open, and you will

die from loss of blood, or you will be recognized for a Huguenot, and killed, ere you advance fifty yards in the street."

"I must, nevertheless, quit the Louvre," murmured La Mole.

"Must," returned Marguerite, fixing her full speaking gaze upon him; "ah, yes: forgive me, I understand; doubtless, there is one who anxiously awaits you. I appreciate the feeling, and reproach myself for not having before thought of it; I should have attended to your mind as well as to your body."

"Madame," said La Mole, "you are mistaken—I am wellnigh alone in the world, and altogether so in Paris. My pursuer is the first man I have spoken to in this city; your majesty the first lady who addressed me."

"Then," said Marguerite, "why would you go?"

"Because," replied La Mole, "last night you had no rest, and that to-night—"

Marguerite blushed.

"Gillonne," said she, "it is time to take that key to the king of Navarre."

Gillonne smiled, and left the room.

"But," continued Marguerite, "if you are alone, without friends, what will you do?"

"Madame, I soon shall have friends, for while I was pursued, I saw the form of my mother guiding me to the Louvre, and I vowed, if I were spared, to abjure. Heaven has done more than save my life—it has sent me one of its angels to make life dear to me."

"But you cannot walk; you will faint before you have gone a hundred yards."

"Madame, I have tried to walk in the cabinet; I do so slowly, it is true, but once outside the Louvre, I will take my chance."

Marguerite leaned her head on her hand and reflected for an instant.

"And the king of Navarre," said she emphatically, "you do not speak of him? In changing your religion, have you also changed your desire to enter his service?"

"Madame," returned La Mole, "I know that his majesty runs a great risk at present, and that all your influence will scarce suffice to save him."

"What!" said Marguerite, "how know you that?"

"Madame," returned La Mole, after some hesitation, "one can hear everything in this cabinet."

"'Tis true," said Marguerite to herself; "M. de Guise told me so before."

"Well," added she, aloud, "what have you heard?"

"In the first place, the conversation between your majesty and your brother."

"With Francois?" said Marguerite.

"With the Duke d'Alencon; and since your departure, that of Gillonne and Madame de Sauve."

"And it is these two conversations—?"

"Yes, madame; married scarcely a week, you love your husband; to-night he will come, in his turn, in the same way that the Duke d'Alencon and Madame de Sauve have come; he will discourse with you of his affairs: I do not wish to hear: I might be indiscreet—I will give myself no chance of being so."

At the last words, and their manner, Marguerite comprehended all.

"Ah!" said she, "you have heard everything that has been said in this chamber?"

"Yes, madame."

These words were uttered in a sigh.

"And you wish to depart to-night, to avoid hearing any more?"

"This moment, if it please your majesty."

"Poor fellow!" said Marguerite, with an accent of tender pity.

Astonished at so gentle an apostrophe, when he expected an abrupt reply, La Mole lifted his head timidly—his eyes encountered those of the queen, and remained immovable before her penetrating glance.

"You are, then, incapable of keeping a secret, M. de la Mole?" said the queen, who, seated in a large chair, could watch La Mole's face while her own remained in the shadow.

"Madame," said La Mole, "I distrust myself, and the happiness of another gives me pain."

"The happiness of whom? Ah, yes—of the king of Navarre! Poor Henry!"

"You see," cried La Mole, passionately, "he is happy."

"Happy?"

"Yes, for your majesty pities him."

Marguerite played with the golden tassels of her alms-purse.

"You will not, then, see the king of Navarre—you are quite resolved?"

"I fear I should be troublesome to his majesty at present."

"But the Duke d'Alencon, my brother?"

"Oh, no!' cried La Mole, "the Duke d'Alencon even still less than the king of Navarre."

"Why so?" asked Marguerite.

"Because, although I am already too bad a Huguenot to be a faithful servant of the king of Navarre, I am not a sufficiently good Catholic to be friends with the Duke d'Alencon and M. de Guise."

Marguerite cast down her eyes; that which La Mole had said struck to her very heart.

At this instant Gillonne returned; Marguerite, with a look, interrogated her, and Gillonne, in the same manner, answered in the affirmative; the king of Navarre had received the key.

Marguerite turned her eyes toward La Mole, who stood, his head drooping on his breast, sad, pale, grief-laden, as one suffering alike in mind and in body.

"M. de la Mole is so proud," said she, "that I hesitate to make him an offer I fear he will repel."

La Mole rose, and advanced a step toward Marguerite, but a feeling of faintness came over him, and he caught at a table to save himself from falling.

"You see, monsieur," cried Marguerite, supporting him in her arms, "that I am still necessary to you."

"Oh, yes!" murmured La Mole, "as the air I breathe—as the light of heaven."

At this moment three knocks were heard at the outer door.

"Do you hear, madame?" cried Gillonne, alarmed.

"Already!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Shall I open?"

"Wait! it is the king of Navarre, perhaps."

"Oh, madame!" cried La Mole, recalled to himself by these words, which the queen hoped had been heard by Gillonne alone, "I implore—I entreat you, let me depart. Oh! you do not answer. I will tell you all, and then you will drive me away, I hope."

"Be silent," said Marguerite, who found an indescribable charm in the reproaches of the young man; "be silent."

"Madame," replied La Mole, who did not find that anger he expected in the voice of the queen, "madame, I tell you again, I hear everything from this cabinet. Oh, do not make me perish by tortures more cruel than the executioner could inflict—"

"Silence! silence!" said Marguerite.

"Oh, you are merciless! you will not understand me. Know, then, that I—"

"Silence! I tell you," said Marguerite, placing on his mouth her white and perfumed hand, which he seized and pressed eagerly to his lips.

"But—" murmured he.

"Be silent, child!—who is this rebel that refuses to obey his queen?"

Then, hastily quitting the cabinet, she pressed her hand to her heart, as if to control it.

"And now, open, Gillonne."

Gillonne left the apartment, and an instant after the fine, intellectual, but at present somewhat anxious countenance of the king of Navarre appeared.

"You have sent for me, madame?"

"Yes, sir. Your majesty received my letter?"

"And not without some surprise, I confess," said Henry, looking round with distrust, which, however, almost instantly vanished from his mind.

"And not without disquiet," added Marguerite.

"I confess it! But still, surrounded as I am by deadly enemies, by friends still more dangerous, perhaps, than my open foes, I recollected that one evening I had seen a noble generosity radiant in your eyes—'twas the night of our marriage: that one other evening I had seen high courage glance from them—'twas yesterday, the day fixed for my death."

"Well, monsieur!" said Marguerite, smiling, while Henry seemed striving to read her heart.

"Well, madame," returned the king, "thinking of these things, I said to myself, when I read your letter: Without friends, for he is a disarmed prisoner, the king of Navarre has but one means of dying nobly, of dying a death that will be recorded in history. It is to die betrayed by his wife; and I am come—"

"Sir," replied Marguerite, "you will change your tone when you learn that all this is the work of a woman who loves you, and whom you love."

Henry started back at these words, and his piercing gray eyes were fixed on the queen with earnest curiosity.

"Oh, reassure yourself, sir," said the queen, smiling; "I am not that person."

"But, madame," said Henry, "*you* sent me this key, and this is *your* writing."

"It is my writing, I confess; but the key is a different matter: content you with knowing that it has passed through the hands of four women before it reached you."

"Of four women?"

"Yes," said Marguerite; "those of Queen Catherine, Madame de Sauve, Gillonne, and myself."

Henry pondered over this enigma.

"Let us speak plainly," said Marguerite. "Report says your majesty has consented to abjure. Is that true?"

"Report is somewhat premature: I have not yet consented."

"But your mind is made up?"

"That is to say, I am deliberating. At twenty, and almost a king, there are many things that are well worth a mass."

"Life, for instance!"

Henry smiled.

"You do not tell me *all*," said the queen.

"I have reservations for my allies; and you know we are but allies as yet; if, indeed, you were both my ally and—"

"And your wife, sir?"

"Ma foi! yes, and my wife—"

"What then?"

"Why, then, it might be different, and I perhaps might resolve to remain king of the Huguenots, as they call me. But, as it is, I must be content to live."

Marguerite looked at her husband in so peculiar a manner, that it would have awakened suspicion in a less acute mind than his.

"And are you quite sure of retaining even that?" asked she.

"Why, almost; but, you know, in this world, nothing is certain."

"Truly, your majesty shows such moderation, such disinterestedness, that after having renounced your crown, your religion, you may be expected to satisfy the hopes of some people, and renounce your alliance with a daughter of France!"

There was a significance in these words that sent a thrill through Henry's whole frame: repressing the emotion, he said:

"Recollect, madame, that at this moment I am not my own master: I shall therefore do what the king of France orders me. As to myself, were I consulted the least in the world on this question, affecting as it does my throne, my honor, and my life, rather than build my future hopes on this forced marriage of ours, I would enter a cloister or turn gamekeeper."

This calm resignation, this renunciation of the world, alarmed Marguerite. She thought, perhaps this rupture of the marriage had been arranged between Charles IX., Catherine, and her husband, and the young queen felt her ambition attacked.

"Your majesty," said Marguerite, with a sort of disdainful raillery, "has no confidence in the star that shines over the head of every king!"

"Ah," said Henry, "I cannot see mine: it is hidden by the storm that now threatens me!"

"And suppose the breath of a woman were to dispel this threatened tempest, and make the star reappear, brilliant as ever?"

"'Twere difficult."

"Do you deny the existence of this woman?"

"No, I deny her power."

"You mean her will."

"I said her power, and I repeat, her

power. A woman is only powerful when love and interest are combined within her in equal degrees; if either sentiment predominates, she is, like Achilles, vulnerable; and, for the woman in question, if I mistake not, I cannot rely on her love."

Marguerite made no reply.

"Listen," said Henry. "At the last stroke of the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, you most likely thought of regaining your liberty, sacrificed to the interests of your party. For myself, I thought of saving my life; that was the essential point. We lose Navarre, indeed; but what is that compared with your being enabled to speak aloud in your chamber, which you dared not do when you had some one listening to you in yonder cabinet?"

Marguerite could not refrain from smiling. The king rose and prepared to seek his own apartment; for it was eleven, and everybody at the Louvre was, or seemed to be, asleep.

Henry advanced toward the door, then, as if suddenly recollecting the motive of his visit:

"Apropos, madame!" said he. "Had you not something to communicate to me? or did you desire to give me an opportunity of thanking you for having saved my life? You came, I confess, like a goddess of antiquity, just in time to save me."

"What!" exclaimed Marguerite, seizing her husband's arm; "do you not see that nothing is saved, neither your liberty, your crown, nor your life? Infatuated Henry! Did you, then, see nothing in my letter but an amorous rendezvous?"

"I confess, madame," said Henry, all astonishment; "I confess—"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

At this instant a strange sound was heard, like a sharp scratching at the secret door.

Marguerite led the king thither.

"Listen," said she.

"The queen-mother is leaving her apartments," said a trembling voice outside, which Henry instantly recognized as that of Madame de Sauve.

"Where is she going?" asked Marguerite.

"She is coming to your majesty."

And then the rustling of silk showed that Madame de Sauve was hastening rapidly away.

"Oh, oh!" said Henry.

"I was sure of this," said Marguerite.

"And I," replied Henry, "feared it, as this will prove."

And half opening his doublet of black velvet, he showed the queen that he had beneath it a shirt of mail, and a long Milan poniard, which instantly glittered in his hand.

"They are needless," cried Marguerite. "Quick, quick, sir! conceal that dagger: 'tis the queen-mother, indeed, but the queen-mother only."

"Yet—"

"Silence!—I hear her."

And she whispered something in Henry's ear, who instantly hid himself behind the curtains of the bed.

Marguerite sprang into the cabinet, where La Mole awaited her, and pressing his hand in the darkness—"Silence," said she, approaching her lips so near that he felt her breath; "silence!"

Then, returning to her chamber, she tore off her head-dress, cut the lace of her dress with her poniard, and sprang into bed. It was time—the key turned in the lock. Catherine had a key for every door in the Louvre.

"Who is there?" cried Marguerite, as Catherine placed on guard at the door the four gentlemen by whom she was attended.

And, as if frightened by this intrusion into her chamber, Marguerite sprang out of bed in a white dressing-gown, and then, seeming to recognize Catherine, came to kiss her hand with so well-feigned a surprise that the wily Florentine herself was deceived.

CHAPTER XIV.

CATHERINE AND MARGUERITE.

THE queen-mother surveyed the chamber with eager and curious eyes; but the sight of Marguerite's velvet slippers at the foot of the bed, her vestments thrown

negligently upon the chairs, joined to the well-feigned drowsiness with which she endeavored to open her eyes, convinced Catherine that she had really roused her daughter from her slumbers.

Smiling, therefore, the self-complacent smile of one whose plan of attack has been successful, she drew a chair toward her, saying:

"Let us sit down, my child, and have a little talk together."

"I am all attention, madame."

"It is time," said Catherine, shutting her eyes and speaking with that slowness peculiar to persons of great reflection or equal dissimulation—"it is time, I say, my daughter, that you should know how ardently your brother and myself desire to see you happy."

This was a somewhat alarming exordium for those who were acquainted with Catherine's real disposition.

"What can she be about to say?" thought Marguerite.

"Certainly," continued the Florentine, "in marrying you we fulfilled one of those acts of policy frequently peremptorily demanded for the interest of the kingdom and those who govern it; but I must honestly confess to you, my poor child, that we had no expectation that the indifference manifested by the king of Navarre for one so young, so lovely and fascinating as yourself, would have been so obstinately persisted in."

Marguerite arose, and folding her robe de chambre around her, curtseyed with ceremonious respect to her mother.

"I have heard to-night only (otherwise I should have paid you an earlier visit) that your husband is far from showing you those attentions you have a right to claim, not merely as a beautiful woman, but as a princess of France."

Marguerite gently sighed, and Catherine, encouraged by this mute approval, proceeded:

"I am even assured the king of Navarre has a liaison with one of my maids of honor, and that he openly avows his disgraceful passion for her. Now, that he should despise the affection of the superior being we have bestowed upon him is unfortunately one of those evils which, powerful as we are, we have no means of remedying; although the meanest gentleman of our court would quickly demand satisfaction for so great an insult."

Marguerite's eyes sought the ground. Her mother continued:

"For some time past, my daughter, I have been well assured by your red and swollen eyes, as well as the bitterness of your sallies against Madame de Sauve, that, try as you would, your poor wounded heart is not content to bleed and break in silent sorrow."

Marguerite started—a slight movement shook the curtains of the bed, but, fortunately, it passed unperceived by Catherine.

"Knowing all this, my beloved child," said she, with increased gentleness and affection, "it follows, as a matter of course, that a tender parent would seek to apply healing balm to the wound your heart has received. Have not those, therefore, who, hoping to secure your happiness, dictated your marriage, but who now, to their deep regret, discover that the obscure coarse-minded boor on whom they bestowed your hand neglects your beauty and despises your charms, and awaits but the first favorable chance of separating himself from our family, and thrusting you from his house—have not, I ask you, those same kind and watchful friends the right of securing your interests by entirely dividing them from his, so that your future prospects may offer a vista of greatness better suited to your illustrious descent and surpassing merits?"

"I beseech you, madame," replied Marguerite, "to pardon my presumption, in venturing to remark (after observations so replete with maternal love, and so calculated to fill me with joy and pride, as those you have just uttered), that after all your majesty has so ably advanced, the king of Navarre is my husband."

Catherine started with rage—then drawing closer to Marguerite she said: "He your husband? Do the few words pronounced over you by a priest warrant your styling him your husband? Ah! my child! such a state of things is a des-

ecration, not a consecration of the marriage ceremony. Were you Madame de Sauve, indeed, you might make that assertion. But, wholly contrary to our expectations, directly we bestowed your hand on Henry of Navarre, he seemed more than indifferent toward you; permitting you, indeed, to hold the empty title of wife, while another engrossed his time and affections. Come with me. At this very moment, even," said Catherine, raising her voice: "this key opens the door of Madame de Sauve's apartment—accompany me thither, and you will see—"

"Oh, not so loud, madame!—not so loud, I beseech you!" said Marguerite; "for not only are you mistaken, but—"

"But what?"

"I fear you will awaken my husband!"

As she said these words, Marguerite gracefully arose, her white dress fluttering loosely around her, while the large open sleeves displayed her matchless hand and arm; carrying one of the rose-colored tapers toward the bed, she gently drew back the curtain, and smiling significantly at her mother, pointed to the king of Navarre, who, stretched in easy negligence upon the couch, seemed buried in profound repose.

Pale and wonder-stricken, her body thrown back as though to avoid some abyss that had opened at her feet, Catherine uttered not a cry, but a kind of savage yell.

"You perceive, madame," said Marguerite; "you were misinformed!"

Catherine alternately gazed from her daughter to the sleeping king, and again scrutinized the features of Marguerite; but the countenance of the latter bore unshrinkingly the searching glances of the queen-mother, who bit her thin lips with impotent rage at finding herself thus baffled. After permitting Catherine to contemplate a picture as hateful to her as the head of Medusa, Marguerite let fall the curtain, and walking on tiptoe back to her chair, resumed her place beside Catherine, saying, "What is your opinion at present, madame?"

The Florentine again fixed her piercing looks on Marguerite, as though she would read her very thoughts; but baffled and disconcerted by the calm placidity of her daughter's face, she rose in deep and concentrated fury, and merely replying, "I have no further opinion than that already expressed!" hastened precipitately from the apartment.

No sooner had the sound of her departing footsteps died away in the vast corridor than the bed-curtains opened a second time, and Henry, with sparkling eye, trembling hand, and panting breath, sprung to Marguerite's feet; he had hastily thrown off his velvet pourpoint, and appeared merely in his nether garments and his coat of mail. Amid all her alarm and agitation, Marguerite could not restrain a hearty laugh at the singular costume adopted by a recently made husband to pay a visit to his bride's chamber; while, at the same time, she kindly and warmly pressed the hand of him she had so ably assisted.

"Ah, madame! ah, Marguerite!" exclaimed the king, "how shall I ever repay your goodness?"

"Sir!" replied Marguerite, gently retreating from the warmth of his gratitude, "have you forgotten that an individual to whom you owe your life is at this moment in dire uneasiness on your account? Madame de Sauve," added she, in a lower tone, "has forgotten her jealousy in sending you to me; and to that sacrifice she may probably have to add her life, for no one knows better than yourself how terrible is the anger of my mother."

Henry shuddered; and rising, was about to quit the room.

"Upon second thoughts," said Marguerite, "I see no cause for alarm. The key was given to you without any directions, and you will be considered as having given me the preference to-night."

"And so I do, Marguerite! Consent but to forget—"

"Not so loud!—not so loud, sir!" replied the queen, employing the same words she had a few minutes before used to her mother: "any one in the adjoining cabinet can hear you. I must beg of you to use a lower tone."

"Oh!" said Henry, half smiling, half gloomily, "that's true! I forgot that I was probably not the person with whom the interesting events of to-day were to close! This cabinet—"

"Let me beg of your majesty to enter there," said Marguerite; "for I am desirous of having the honor of presenting to you a brave gentleman, wounded during the massacre, while endeavoring to make his way to the Louvre, for the purpose of apprising your majesty of the danger with which you were threatened."

The queen advanced toward the door, followed by Henry. She opened it, and the king was thunderstruck at beholding a man in this cabinet, fated to reveal such continued surprises.

But, however great the king's astonishment, that of La Mole, at thus unexpectedly finding himself in the presence of Henry of Navarre, was still greater. The king cast an ironical glance on Marguerite, who bore it without flinching.

"Sir," said she, "I am in dread that this gentleman may be murdered even here, in the sanctuary of my apartments; he is devoted to the service of your majesty, and for that reason I commend him to your royal protection."

"Sir," continued the young man, "I am the Count Lerac de la Mole; the same your majesty expected, who was so warmly recommended to you by M. de Teligny, who was killed by my side."

"Indeed!" replied Henry; "is it so, sir? I remember the queen gave me a letter from that honorable gentleman; but, methinks, if you be the Count de la Mole, you should also be the bearer of a letter from the governor of Languedoc."

"Your majesty is right: such a paper was intrusted to me, with earnest recommendation to deliver it into your royal hands as soon as possible."

"And wherefore did you delay?"

"Sir, I was at the Louvre yesterday evening for that purpose; but your majesty was too much occupied to give me audience."

"True!" answered the king; "but in that case why not send the letter to me?"

"Because M. d'Auriac had strictly charged me to give it into no other hands than those of your majesty, since it contained, he said, information so important that he feared to intrust it to any ordinary messenger."

"The contents are, indeed, of a serious nature," said the king, when he had received and perused the letter; "advising my instant withdrawal from the court of France, and retirement to Béarn. M. d'Auriac, although a Catholic, was always a stanch friend of mine; and it is possible, that acting as governor of a province, he got scent of what was in the wind here. Ventre-saint-gris! monsieur! why was not this letter given to me three days ago, instead of now?"

"Because, as I before assured your majesty, that using all the speed and diligence in my power, it was wholly impossible to arrive before yesterday."

"That is very unfortunate," murmured the king; "for had you done so, we should at this time have been in security, either at Rochelle, or in some broad plain surrounded by two or three thousand trusty horsemen."

"Sir," said Marguerite, in an undertone, "what is done is done, and instead of losing your time in useless recrimination, it is expedient for you to make the best arrangement you can for the future."

"Then," replied Henry, with his usual glance of interrogation, "I am to suppose that, in my place, you would not despair?"

"Certainly not; I should consider myself as playing a game of three points, of which I had lost only the first."

"Ah, madame," whispered Henry, "if I durst but hope that you would go partners with me in the game, I should indeed flatter myself with hopes of success."

"Had I intended to have sided with your adversaries," replied Marguerite, "I should scarcely have delayed thus long in avowing my intentions."

"True!" replied Henry, "and I am very ungrateful; but, as you say, the past may still be repaired. But, madame," continued he, attentively observing La Mole, "this gentleman cannot remain

here without causing you considerable inconvenience, and being himself subject to very unpleasant surprises. What will you do with him?"

"Does your majesty consider there will be any difficulty in getting him out of the Louvre?—for I am precisely of your opinion as regards his staying."

"I fear it will be both difficult and dangerous to attempt such a thing as procuring egress for the young man."

"Then, could not your majesty find accommodation for M. de la Mole in your own apartments?"

"Alas, madame! you speak as though I were still king of the Huguenots, and had subjects to command. You are aware that I am half converted to the Catholic faith."

Any one but Marguerite would have promptly answered:

"And he also is a Catholic." But the queen wished Henry himself to ask her to do the very thing she was desirous of effecting; while La Mole, perceiving the hesitation of his protectress, and not knowing what to say or do in so dangerous a court as was that of France, remained perfectly silent.

"But what is this the governor says in his letter?" said Henry, again casting his eyes over the missive he held in his hand. "He states that your mother was a Catholic, and from that circumstance originates the interest he felt in you."

"And what were you telling me, M. le Comte, respecting a vow you had formed to change your religion? I confess my recollection on the subject is somewhat confused. Have the goodness to assist me, M. de la Mole. Did not your conversation refer to something of the nature his majesty appears to desire?"

"Alas! madame, what I did say was so coldly received by your majesty, that I had not the courage to repeat it."

"Simply because it in no way concerned me," answered Marguerite. "But explain yourself to the king—make fully known what you were desirous of stating to me."

"What is the vow you referred to?" asked the king. "Let me hear."

"Sir," said La Mole, "when pursued by assassins, myself unarmed, and almost expiring with pain and agony from my wounds, I fancied I beheld the spirit of my mother, holding a cross in her hands, and guiding me toward the Louvre. Under this impression, I solemnly avowed that if my life were preserved, I would adopt the religion of my mother, who had been permitted to leave her grave to direct me to a place of safety during that horrible night. Heaven conducted me hither, where I hold myself doubly secure, under the protection of a princess of France and of the king of Navarre; and in deep gratitude for the miraculous preservation vouchsafed to me, I am ready to fulfill my vow and become a Catholic."

Henry frowned. Skeptic as he was, he could well understand a change of religion from motives of interest; but as a matter of faith and conscience, it was wholly beyond his comprehension.

"It is all over!" thought Marguerite; "the king evidently will have nothing to do with my protégé."

La Mole still remained a mute spectator of the rest of a scene, in which he felt, without being able to define why, that he played but a ridiculous part. Marguerite's tact and woman's wit came again, happily, to his relief and rescue.

"Sir," said she, "we both forget that the poor wounded gentleman has need of repose. For myself, I am half asleep. See!—he is growing pale, as though he would faint."

La Mole did, indeed, turn pale; but it was at Marguerite's last words, which he had interpreted according to his own ideas.

"Well, madame," answered Henry, "nothing can be easier than for you and I to retire, and leave M. de la Mole to take the repose he so much needs."

The young man fixed a supplicating look on Marguerite, and, spite of the august presence in which he stood, sunk upon a chair, overcome with fatigue and pain. Marguerite fully comprehended the passionate love contained in that glance, the utter despair, in the prostration of strength which took from his limbs the power of supporting him.

"Sir," said she, "your majesty is bound to confer on this young man, who periled his life for his king, since it was while coming hither to acquaint you with the death of the admiral and Teligny he received his wounds—is bound, I repeat, to confer on him an honor, for which he will be ever grateful."

"What is it, madame?" asked Henry. "Command me—I am ready to do whatever you dictate."

"'Tis to permit M. de la Mole to repose to-night at your majesty's feet, while you, sir, can sleep on this couch. With the permission of my august spouse," added Marguerite, smiling, "I will summon Gillonne and return to bed; for I can assure you I am not the least wearied of us three."

Henry had shrewd sense, and a quick perception of things: friends and enemies subsequently found fault with him for possessing too much of both. He fully admitted that she who thus banished him from the nuptial bed was well justified in so doing by the indifference he had himself manifested toward her—and then, too, she had just repaid this indifference by saving his life; he therefore did not allow his wounded self-love to dictate his answer, but merely replied:

"If, madame, M. de la Mole were capable of coming to my apartments, I would give him up my own bed."

"Nay," said Marguerite, "I scarcely deem that either you or he would be in safety there to-night, and prudence directs that your majesty should remain here until the morning."

Then, without awaiting any further reply from the king, she summoned Gillonne, and bade her prepare the necessary cushions for the king, and to arrange a bed at the king's feet for M. de la Mole, who appeared so happy and contented with the honor done him, as almost to forget his wounds.

Then Marguerite, curtseying low to the king, passed into the adjoining chamber, the door of which was well furnished with bolts, and threw herself on the bed.

"One thing is certain," said Marguerite, mentally, "that, to-morrow, M. de la Mole must have a protector at the Louvre; and he, who, to-night, sees and hears nothing, may change his mind to-morrow."

Then, calling Gillonne, she said in a whisper, "Gillonne, you must contrive to bring my brother D'Alencon here to-morrow morning before eight o'clock."

The loud peal of the Louvre clock chimed the second hour after midnight.

La Mole, after a short parley with the king on political subjects, was left to his own reflections; for Henry fell asleep in the midst of one of his own speeches, and snored as lustily as though he had been reposing on his own leathern couch in Béarn.

La Mole might also have sunk into the arms of sleep, but his ideas were continually disturbed and disarranged by his proximity to Marguerite, who, a prey to restless thoughts, turned and re-turned on her pillow; while the mind of La Mole became occupied in sympathetic surprise as to what could trouble the slumbers of one so highly favored both by nature and fortune.

"He is very young and timid," murmured the wakeful queen; "but his eyes are rich with manly expression, and his form is one of nobleness and beauty: 'twere pity he should turn out otherwise than brave and loyal. Well, well, 'tis useless speculating upon uncertain chances: the affair has begun well, let us hope it will finish so; and now to commend myself to the triple deity to whom that madcap Henriette pays homage, and court its aid to procure a visit from the drowsy god."

And as morning broke, Marguerite fell asleep, murmuring, "*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*"

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT WOMAN WILLS, HEAVEN WILLS ALSO.

MARGUERITE was right. The rage which swelled Catherine's bosom at sight of an expedient whose aim she perceived, although powerless to prevent its effects, required some person on whom she could freely vent it: instead, therefore, of retiring to her own apartment, the queen-mother proceeded to those of her lady-in-waiting.

Madame de Sauve was expecting two visits—one she hoped to receive from Henry, and the other she feared was in store for her from the queen-mother. Reclining on her bed only partially undressed, while Dariole kept watch in the antechamber, she heard a key turn in the lock, followed by a slow, measured tread, the heaviness of which was prevented from reaching her ear through the thickness of the rich carpets over which the newcomer passed; but she felt quite sure it was not the light, eager footstep of Henry; and guessing that Dariole had been prevented from coming to warn her of the visitant who so late intruded on her repose, she lay with beating heart and listening ear, awaiting the nearer approach of friend or foe, as it might turn out.

The curtain which covered the doorway was lifted aside, and Catherine de Medicis appeared. She seemed calm; but Madame de Sauve, accustomed for two years to the study of her crafty and deceitful nature, well knew what fatal designs, as well as bitter thoughts of cruel vengeance, might be concealed beneath that cold imperturbable tranquillity of look and manner.

At sight of Catherine, Madame de Sauve was about to spring from her bed, but Catherine signed to her to remain where she was; and thus her unfortunate victim was compelled to remain as though spell-bound, vainly endeavoring to collect all her strength to endure the storm she felt was breaking over her.

"Did you convey the key to the king of Navarre?" inquired Catherine, in a voice which differed not from her usual tone; the only change was in her lips, which looked paler and paler each instant.

"I did, madame," answered Charlotte, in a voice that vainly sought to imitate the firm assured manner of Catherine.

"And have you seen him?"

"No, madame; but I expect him; and when I heard the sound of a key in the lock, I fully concluded it was he."

This reply, which indicated either a blind confidence or profound dissimulation on the part of Madame de Sauve, enraged Catherine beyond all power of concealment; she literally shook with passion, and clenching her small plump hand, she said with a malignant smile:

"'Tis strange, methinks, you should expect the king of Navarre in your apartments, when you perfectly well know how unlikely it is he should be here!"

"How, madame?"

"Yes, I repeat, you are fully aware that this night the king of Navarre neither could nor would visit you."

"Nothing but death would prevent him, I feel confident," replied Charlotte, urged to a still more determined dissimulation by the certainty of how bitterly she should have to pay for her deceit, were it discovered.

"But did you not write to the king, my pretty Carlotta?" inquired Catherine, with the same cruel and unnatural smile.

"No, madame," answered Charlotte, with well-assumed naïveté, "I cannot recollect receiving your majesty's commands to do so."

A short silence followed, during which Catherine continued to gaze on Madame de Sauve as the serpent regards the bird it wishes to fascinate.

"You think yourself a beauty and a skillful maneuverer, do you not?" asked Catherine.

"No, indeed, madame," answered Charlotte; "I only remember that there have been times when your majesty has been graciously pleased to commend both my personal attractions and address."

"Well, then," said Catherine, growing eager and animated, "whatever I may have said or thought, I now declare that you are but a hideous dolt, when compared to my daughter Margot."

"Oh, madame," replied Charlotte, "that is a fact I seek not to deny—least of all in your presence."

"It follows, then, naturally enough, that the king of Navarre prefers my daughter to you; a circumstance, I presume, not to your wishes, and certainly not what we agreed should be the case."

"Alas! madame," cried Charlotte, bursting into a torrent of tears which now flowed from no feigned source, "if

it be so, I can but say I am very unfortunate!"

"Then take my royal word for its truth," repeated Catherine, again fixing her reptile-like eye upon her victim, till her words seemed to pierce her heart like a two-edged dagger.

"But what reason has your majesty for coming to this conclusion?"

"Proceed to the apartments of the queen of Navarre, you incredulous simpleton! and you will find your lover there. How like you that? Does it excite your jealousy?"

"Me jealous?" said Madame de Sauve, recalling her fast-failing strength and courage.

"Yes, you! Tell me how you mean to act. I have a curiosity to see how a Frenchwoman demonstrates that passion."

"Nay," said Madame de Sauve, "why should your majesty suppose I am wounded in any other feeling than my vanity, since all the interest I feel in the king of Navarre arises from my wish to be of service to your majesty."

Catherine looked at her with a penetrating glance.

"You may be speaking the truth," said she. "Am I, then, to consider you as wholly devoted to my service?"

"Command me, madame, and judge."

"Well, then, Carlotta, if you are really sincere in your professions and protestations, you must (to serve me, understand) affect the utmost affection for the king of Navarre, and, above all, a violent jealousy. Pretend to be jealous as an Italian."

"And in what manner, madame, do the Italian females evince their jealousy?"

"I will instruct you," replied Catherine; who, after remaining some moments as though striving to keep down some powerful emotion, quitted the apartment slowly and noiselessly as she had entered it.

Thankful to be freed from the oppressive gaze of eyes that seemed to expand and dilate like those of the cat or panther, Charlotte permitted her to depart without attempting to utter a word; nor did she breathe freely till Dariole came to tell her that the terrible visitant had entirely disappeared. She then bade the waiting-maid to bring an armchair beside her bed and pass the night, fearing, as she said, to be left alone. Dariole obeyed; but, despite the company of her faithful attendant, despite the bright light from a lamp illumined by her orders, Madame de Sauve remained in trembling expectation of Catherine's return, nor closed her eyes till the dawn of day.

Notwithstanding the late hour at which Marguerite's slumbers had commenced, she awoke at the first sound of the hunting-horns and dogs, and instantly rising, dressed herself in a neglige too decided to escape observation. She then summoned her maids, and caused the ordinary attendants of the king of Navarre to be shown into an antechamber adjoining that in which he had passed the night. Then, opening the door of the chamber which contained both Henry and De la Mole, she cast an affectionate glance on the latter, and said to her husband:

"It is not sufficient, sir, to have persuaded my royal mother that matters are different from what they seem; you must also impress upon your whole court the most perfect belief in the good understanding existing between us. But make yourself quite easy," added she, laughing, "and remember my words, rendered the more impressive by the circumstances under which I utter them, to-day is the very last time your majesty will be subjected to so severe a trial."

Henry smiled, and desired that the officers of his suite should be admitted; but, at the very moment of returning their salutation, he feigned suddenly to recollect having left his mantle on the queen's bed, begged their excuse for receiving them ere fully dressed; then, taking his mantle from the hands of Marguerite, who stood blushing by his side, he clasped it on his shoulder. Next, turning to his gentlemen, he carelessly inquired what was stirring abroad.

Marguerite's quick eye readily caught the expression of utter astonishment impressed on every countenance at the sight

of the excellent terms on which herself and the king of Navarre were; and, ere they had recovered from it, an attendant entering, announced the arrival of the Duke d'Alencon, with three or four officers of his suite.

Gillonne had required no other means to draw him thither, than the information of the king having passed the night in the queen's apartments; and so hurried was the manner of Francois in entering, that he narrowly escaped knocking against every person he met in his way. His first glance was directed to Henry; his next, to Marguerite. The former replied to him by a courteous salutation, while the calm, composed features of Marguerite exhibited the utmost serenity and happiness.

Again the sharp scrutiny of the duke traveled round the chamber, and he quickly observed the two pillows placed at the head of the bed, the derangement of its tapestried coverings, and the king's plumed hat carelessly thrown on a chair beside it.

At this sight his color forsook his cheeks, but quickly recovering himself, he said:

"Does my royal brother Henry join this morning with the king in his game of tennis?"

"Does his majesty do me the honor to select me as his partner?" inquired Henry, "or is it only a little attention on your own part, my kind brother-in-law?"

"His majesty has not so said, certainly," replied the duke, somewhat embarrassed; "but as you play with him so habitually, I considered—"

Henry smiled, for so many and such serious events had occurred since he last played with the king, that he would not have been astonished to learn that the king had changed his habitual companions at the game.

"I shall certainly join the king in his sport," said Henry, with a smile.

"Then come," cried the duke.

"Are you going away?" inquired Marguerite.

"Yes, my sweet sister!"

"Are you in great haste to be gone?"

"In very great!"

"Might I venture to ask you to grant me a few minutes ere you depart?"

So strange and wholly unaccustomed a demand from Marguerite filled D'Alencon with a vague and uneasy feeling of something to be apprehended, and his color changed rapidly from a deep flush to the palest hue.

"What can she be going to say to him?" thought Henry, taken as much by surprise as the duke himself.

Marguerite quietly proceeded to the door of the cabinet, and beckoned forth the wounded man, saying to Henry:

"It is for your majesty to explain to my brother the reason for our taking an interest in M. de la Mole."

And Henry, caught in the snare so cleverly laid by Marguerite, briefly related to M. d'Alencon, half a Protestant for the sake of opposition, as he himself was partly a Catholic from prudence, the arrival of M. de la Mole at Paris, and how the young man had been severely wounded, while bringing to him a letter from M. d'Auriac.

As the duke turned round after listening to this recital, he perceived the hero of the tale standing before him.

At the sight of his pale handsome countenance, rendered still more captivating by the marks of recent weakness and suffering, a fresh feeling of anger and distrust shot through his heart.

"Brother," said Marguerite, after she had well observed the various changes of D'Alencon's countenance, "I will engage for this young gentleman, that he will render himself serviceable to whomsoever may employ him. Should you accept his services, he will obtain a powerful protector, and you a faithful, zealous servitor. In such times as the present, brother," continued she, "we cannot be too well surrounded by devoted friends: more especially," added she, lowering her voice so as to be heard only by the duke, "when one is ambitious and has the misfortune to be only third in the succession to the throne."

Then, placing her finger significantly on her lip, she intimated to D'Alencon that she had not revealed the whole of her views

and ideas on the subject, but had the most important part still buried within her own breast.

"Perhaps," added she, "you may differ from Henry in considering it not decorous or befitting that this young gentleman should remain so immediately in the vicinity of my apartments."

"Sister," replied Francois, "if it meet your wishes, M. de la Mole shall, in half an hour, be installed in my apartments, where, I think, he can have no cause to fear any danger. Let him try to win my affection, and I promise him he shall obtain it."

"Excellent," murmured Marguerite to herself, as she saw the frown that hung over the brow of the king of Navarre. "Ah, I see plainly enough, that to lead you both as I would have you go, it is necessary to make one lead the other."

And in half an hour after this, La Mole, having been gravely lectured by Marguerite, kissed the hem of her robe, and descended to the apartments of D'Alencon, with a step wondrously light and agile for one who had been so recently wounded.

Several days passed away, and appeared still further to consolidate the harmony apparently existing between Henry and his wife.

Henry had obtained permission not to make a public renunciation of his religion; but he had formally recanted in the presence of the king's confessor, and every day went openly to mass.

At midnight he took ostensibly the road to his wife's apartments, entered by the principal door, and after remaining some time in conversation with her, quitted by the secret door, and ascended to the chamber of Madame de Sauve, who had duly informed him of the visit of the queen-mother, as well as the imminent danger which so seriously threatened him. Thus warned and protected on both sides, Henry redoubled his mistrust and his caution against Catherine, and this with a deeper impression of such a line of proceeding being necessary, as the queen-mother had lately bestowed smiles instead of frowns on him, and addressed him with words of studied cordiality.

Though the massacres still continued, their extent and violence were naturally lessened, and bade fair soon to end; for so great had been the butchery of the Huguenots that the supply began to fail, and fresh victims were not easily found. The greater part of those unfortunate people were already sacrificed. Many had found safety in flight, and others were in concealment. Occasionally a great outcry would arise in some neighborhood in which a fresh object of popular fury was discovered; and the execution was either public or private, according as the spot was either a confined one or admitted of escape.

Charles the Ninth had taken great pleasure in hunting down the Huguenots, and when he could no longer continue the chase himself, he took delight in the noise of others hunting.

One day, returning from playing at mall, which with tennis and hunting were his favorite amusements, he went to his mother's apartments in high spirits, followed by his usual train of courtiers.

"Mother," he said, embracing the Florentine, who, observing his joy, endeavored to detect its cause; "mother, good news! Mort de tous les diables! Do you know that the illustrious carcass of the admiral, which it was said was lost, has been found?"

"Ah, ah!" said Catherine.

"Oh, mon Dieu! yes. You thought as I did, mother, the dogs had eaten a wedding dinner off him; but it was not so. My people, my dear people, my good people, had a clever idea, and have hung the admiral up at the gibbet of Montfaucon."

"Well!" said Catherine.

"Well, good mother," replied Charles IX., "I have a strong desire to see him again, dear old man, now I know he is really dead! It is very fine, and the flowers seem to smell very sweet to-day. The air is full of life and perfume, and I feel better than I ever did. If you like, mother, we will get on horseback, and go to Montfaucon."

"Willingly, my son," said Catherine, "if I had not an appointment that I cannot defer; and beside, to pay a visit to a man of such importance as the admiral.

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we should assemble the whole court. It will be an occasion for observers to make very curious observations. We shall see who comes and who stays away."

"Ma foi! you are right, mother, and it will be better to-morrow; so send out your invitations, and I will send mine; or, rather, do not let us invite any one. We will only say we are going, and then every one will be free to do as they please. Adieu, mother! I am going to play on the horn."

"You will exhaust yourself, Charles, as Ambroise Pare is always telling you; and he is right. It is too trying an exercise for you."

"Bah! bah! bah!" said Charles; "I wish I was sure nothing else would kill me; I would then bury everybody here, including Harry, who will one day succeed us all—as Nostradamus prophesies."

Catherine frowned.

"My son," she said, "mistrust more especially all things that appear impossible, and in the meanwhile take care of yourself."

"Only two or three blasts to rejoice my dogs, who are wearied to death with doing nothing, poor things! I ought to have let them loose on the Huguenots; that would have done them good!" And Charles IX. left his mother's apartment, went into his armory, took down a horn, and sounded it with a vigor that would have done honor to Roland himself. It was difficult to understand how so weak a frame and such pale lips could blow a blast so powerful.

Catherine, in truth, was awaiting some one, as she had told her son. A minute after he had left her, one of her women came and spoke to her in a low voice. The queen smiled, rose, and saluting the persons who formed her court, followed the messenger.

Rene the Florentine, he to whom, on the eve of St. Bartholomew, the king of Navarre had given so diplomatic a reception, entered the oratory.

"Ah! is it you, Rene?" said Catherine. "Have you renewed, as I desired, the trial of the horoscope drawn by Ruggieri, and which agrees so well with the prophecy of Nostradamus, which says that all my three sons shall reign?"

"Yes, madame," replied Rene; "for it is my duty to obey you in all things."

"Well—and the result?"

"Still the same, madame."

"What, the black lamb has uttered three cries?"

"Precisely, madame."

"The sign of three cruel deaths in my family," murmured Catherine.

"Alas!" said Rene.

"What then?"

"Then, madame, there was in its entrails that strange displacing of the liver, which we had already observed in the two first."

"A change of dynasty still—still—still!" muttered Catherine; "yet this must be changed, Rene," she added.

Rene shook his head.

"I have told your majesty," he said, "that destiny rules all."

"Is that your opinion?" asked Catherine.

"Yes, madame."

"Do you remember D'Albret's horoscope?"

"Yes, madame."

"Let us repeat it, and once more consider it. I have quite forgotten it. Repeat it to me, good Rene."

"*Vives honorata,*" said Rene, "*morieris reformidata, regina amplificabere.*"

"Which means, I believe," said Catherine, "*Thou shalt live honored*—and she lacked common necessaries; *Thou shalt die feared*—and we laughed at her; *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen*—and she is dead, and sleeps in a tomb, on which we have not even engraved her name."

"Madame, your majesty does not translate the *vives honorata* rightly. The queen of Navarre lived honored; for all her life she enjoyed the love of her children, the respect of her partisans; respect and love all the more sincere in that she was poor."

"Yes," said Catherine, "I pass over the *vives honorata;* but *morieris reformidata:* how will you explain that?"

"Nothing more easy: Thou shalt die feared."

"Well—did she die feared?"

"So much so, that she would not have died had not your majesty feared her. Then—*As a queen thou shalt be greater;* or, *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen.* This is equally true, madame; for in exchange for a terrestrial crown, she has doubtless, as a queen and martyr, a celestial crown; and, besides, who knows what the future may reserve for her posterity?"

Catherine was superstitious to an excess; she was more alarmed at Rene's cool pertinacity than at the pertinacity of the auguries; and she said suddenly to him, without any other transition than the working of her own thoughts:

"Are any Italian perfumes arrived?"

"Yes, madame."

"Send me a box full."

"Of which?"

"Of the last of those—"

Catherine stopped.

"Of those the queen of Navarre was so fond of?" asked Rene.

"Exactly."

"I need not prepare them, for your majesty is now as skillful at them as myself."

"You think so?" said Catherine. "They certainly do succeed."

"Your majesty has nothing more to say to me?" asked the perfumer.

"Nothing," replied Catherine, thoughtfully; "only if there is any change in the sacrifices, let me know it in time. Let us leave the lambs, and try the hens."

"Alas! madame, I fear that in changing the victim we shall not change the presages."——"Do as I tell you."

The perfumer bowed and left the apartment.

Catherine mused for a short time, then rose, and returning to her bedchamber, where her women awaited her, announced the pilgrimage to Montfaucon for the morrow.

The news of this party of pleasure threw the palace and city into no small bustle: the ladies prepared their most elegant toilets; the gentlemen their finest arms and steeds; the tradesmen closed their shops, and the populace killed a few straggling Huguenots, in order to furnish company to the dead admiral.

La Mole had passed a miserable day, and this miserable day had followed three or four others equally miserable. M. d'Alencon, to please his sister, had installed him in his apartments, but had not since seen him; he felt himself like a poor deserted child, deprived of the tender cares, the soothing attentions of two women, the recollections of one of whom occupied him perpetually. He had heard of her through Ambroise Pare, whom she had sent to him, but Ambroise was an old fellow to whom he could not talk of his passion. Gillonne, indeed, had come once, as if of her own accord, to ask after him, and the visit was to him like a sunbeam darting into a dungeon, but Gillonne had not repeated it.

As soon, then, as he heard of this splendid assemblage of the court on the morrow, La Mole requested of M. d'Alencon the favor of being allowed to accompany it. The duke did not even trouble himself to inquire whether La Mole was sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigue, but merely answered: "Humph! well, let him have one of my horses."

This was all La Mole wanted; Maitre Ambroise Pare came to dress his wounds, and La Mole explained to him the necessity he was under of mounting on horseback, and prayed him to dress his wounds with more than usual care.

The two wounds were closed, both that on the breast and that on the shoulder, and the latter alone pained him. They were both in a fair way of healing; Maitre Ambroise Pare covered them with gummed taffetas, a remedy greatly in vogue then, and promised La Mole that if he did not exert himself too much everything would go well; La Mole next employed a part of the money he had received when he left his family in purchasing a very handsome white satin doublet, and one of the richest embroidered cloaks he could procure. He also bought a pair of boots of perfumed leather, worn at that period. He dressed himself quickly, looked in his glass, and found that he was suitably attired, arranged and perfumed.

While he was thus engaged in the

Louvre, another scene, of a similar kind, was going on at the Hotel de Guise. A tall gentleman, with red hair, was examining, before a glass, a red mark, which went across his face very disagreeably; he colored and perfumed his mustache, and as he did so, in vain tried to conceal this wheal; in spite of all the cosmetics applied, it would still appear. The gentleman then put on a magnificent dress which a tailor had brought to his apartment without any commands from him. Thus attired, scented, and armed from head to foot, he descended the staircase, and began to pat a large black horse, whose beauty would have been matchless, but for a small scar in the flank, caused by a sword wound.

Yet, enchanted with the good steed as he found him, the gentleman, whom, no doubt, our readers have recognized, was soon on his back, and for a quarter of an hour showed off in the court of the Hotel de Guise his skill as a horseman, amid the neighings of his courser, and Mordis out of all number. Then the good steed, completely subdued, recognized by his obedience and subjection the control of the cavalier, but the victory had not been obtained without noise, and this noise had drawn to the windows a lady, whom the cavalier saluted respectfully, and who smiled at him in the most agreeable manner. Turning then toward her first gentleman:

"M. d'Arguzon," she said, "let us set out for the Louvre, and keep an eye, I beg, on the Comte Annibal de Coconnas, for he is wounded, and consequently still weak; and I would not for all the world any accident should happen to him. That would make the Huguenots laugh, for they owe him a spite since the blessed night of Saint Bartholomew."

And Madame de Nevers, mounting her horse, went joyfully toward the Louvre, which was the general rendezvous.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BODY OF A DEAD ENEMY ALWAYS SMELLS SWEET.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, when a file of cavaliers, glittering with gold, jewels, and splendid garments, appeared in the Rue Saint-Denis.

Nothing can be imagined more splendid than this spectacle. The rich and elegant silk dresses, bequeathed as a splendid fashion by Francois I. to his successors, had not yet been changed into those formal and somber vestments which came into fashion under Henry III.; so that the costume of Charles IX., less rich, but perhaps more elegant than those of preceding reigns, displayed its perfect harmony. Pages, esquires, gentlemen of low degree, dogs, and horses—all were there, and formed of the royal cortege an absolute army. Behind this army came the people, or rather the people were everywhere.

That morning, in presence of Catherine, and the Duke de Guise, Charles had, as a perfectly natural thing, spoken before Henry of Navarre of going to visit the gibbet of Montfaucon, or rather, the mutilated corpse of the admiral, which had been suspended to it. Henry's first movement had been to dispense with accompanying them; this Catherine had expected at the first words he said, expressing his repugnance, and she exchanged a glance and a smile with the Duke de Guise; Henry surprised both and understood them, then suddenly turning round, he said:

"But why should I not go? I am a Catholic, and am bound to my new religion."

Then, addressing the king:

"Your majesty may reckon on my company," he said; "and I shall be always happy to accompany you wheresoever you may go;" and he threw a sweeping glance around, to see whose brows might be frowning.

And, perhaps of all this cortege, the person who was looked at with the greatest curiosity was this son without a mother—this king without a kingdom—this Huguenot turned Catholic. His long and marked countenance, his somewhat vulgar figure, his familiarity with his inferiors, which he carried to a degree almost derogatory to a king—a familiarity acquired by the mountaineer habits of his youth,

and which he preserved till his death, marked him out to the spectators, some of whom cried:

"To mass, Harry! to mass!"

To which Henry replied:

"I attended it yesterday, to-day, and I shall attend it again to-morrow. Ventre-saint-gris! surely that is sufficient."

Marguerite was on horseback—so lovely, so fresh, so elegant, that she was the admired of all admirers, although the Duchesse de Nevers shared some portion of the general approval.

"Well, duchesse!" said the queen of Navarre, "what news?"

"Why, madame," replied the duchess aloud, "I know of none." Then in a lower tone: "And what has become of the Huguenot?"

"I have found him a retreat almost safe," replied Marguerite; "and the wholesale murderer, what have you done with him?"

"He wished to be present, and so we mounted him on M. de Nevers' war-horse, a creature as big as an elephant. He is a fearful cavalier. I allowed him to be present to-day, as I felt that your Huguenot would be prudent enough to keep his chamber, and that there was no fear of their meeting."

"Oh, ma foi!" replied Marguerite, smiling, "if he were here, and he is not, I do not think a rencontre would ensue. My Huguenot is remarkably handsome, but nothing more—a dove, and not a hawk; he coos, but does not rend in pieces. After all," she added, with a gesture impossible to describe and shrugging her shoulders slightly; "after all, perhaps, our king thought him a Huguenot, while he is only a Brahmin, and his religion forbids him to shed blood."

"But where, then, is the Duke d'Alencon?" inquired Henriette; "I do not see him."

"Why, at this moment there are shouts down there. It is he, doubtless, who is passing the Porte-Montmartre."

"Yes; it is he, and he seems in good spirits to-day," said Henriette; "he is in love, perchance; and see how nice it is to be a prince of the blood: he gallops over everybody, and everybody draws on one side."

"Yes," said Marguerite, laughing, "he will ride over us. But draw your attendants on one side, duchesse, for one of them will be killed: he does not give way."

"It is my hero!" cried the duchess; "look, only look!"

Coconnas had quitted his rank to approach the Duchesse de Nevers, but at the moment when his horse was crossing the kind of exterior boulevard which separates the street from the Faubourg Saint Denis, a cavalier of the suite of the Duke d'Alencon, trying in vain to rein in his excited horse, dashed full against Coconnas, who, shaken by the collision, well-nigh lost his seat; his hat nearly fell off, and as he put it on firmer, he turned round furiously.

"Dieu!" said Marguerite, in a low tone to her friend, "M. de la Mole!"

"That handsome pale young man?" exclaimed the duchess, unable to repress her first impression.

"Yes, yes; he who nearly upset your Piedmontese."

"Oh," said the duchess, "something terrible will happen! they look at each other—recollect each other!"

Coconnas had indeed recognized La Mole, and in his surprise dropped his bridle, for he believed he had killed his old companion, or at least put him *hors de combat* for some time. La Mole had also recognized Coconnas, and all his blood rushed up into his face. For some seconds, which sufficed for the expression of all the sentiments which these two men felt toward each other, they gazed on one another in a way that frightened the two women.

After which, La Mole having looked about him, and seeing that the place was ill chosen for any explanation, spurred his horse and rejoined the Duke d'Alencon. Coconnas remained stationary for a moment, twisting his mustache until the point almost entered his eye; then, seeing La Mole dash off without a word, he did the same.

"Ah! ah!" said Marguerite, with painful contempt, "I was not deceived.

then !—it is really too much ; " and she bit her lips till the blood came.

" He is very handsome," added the Duchesse de Nevers, with commiseration.

Just at this moment the Duke d'Alencon reached his place behind the king and the queen-mother, so that his suite, in following him, were obliged to pass before Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers. La Mole, as he passed, raised his hat, saluted the queen, and, bowing to his horse's neck, remained uncovered until her majesty should honor him with a look.

But Marguerite turned her head aside disdainfully.

La Mole, no doubt, comprehended the contemptuous expression of the queen's features, and from pale he became livid, and that he might not fall from his horse, was compelled to hold on by the mane.

" Ah, ah ! " said Henriette to the queen ; " look, cruel that you are !—he is going to faint."

" Good," said the queen, with a smile of disdain ; " it only needs that. Where are your salts ? "

Madame de Nevers was mistaken. La Mole, with an effort, recovered himself, and, sitting erect on his horse, took his place in the Duke d'Alencon's suite.

As they went forward, they at length saw the fearful outline of the gibbet, erected and first used by Enguerrand de Marigny.

The guards advanced and formed a large ring round the spot ; at their approach, the crows perched on the gibbet flew away, croaking and angry.

The crowd advanced ; the king and Catherine arrived first, then the Duke d'Anjou, the Duke d'Alencon, the king of Navarre, M. de Guise, and their followers ; then Madame Marguerite, the Duchesse de Nevers, and all the women who composed what was called *l'escadron volant de la reine* (the queen's flying squadron) ; then the pages, squires, attendants, and people — in all ten thousand persons.

To the principal gibbet was suspended a misshapen mass, stained with coagulated blood and mud, whitened by layers of dust. The carcase was headless, and they had hung it up by the legs, and the people, ingenious as they always are, had replaced the head with a bunch of straw, on which they had put a mask ; and in the mouth of this mask some wag, knowing the admiral's habit, had introduced a toothpick.

It was a sight at once appalling and singular, as all these elegant lords and handsome ladies defiled in the midst of blackened carcases and gibbets, and their long and sinister arms.

Many could scarcely support this horrible spectacle, and by his paleness might be distinguished, in the center of rallied Huguenots, Henry, who, however great his power over himself and his amount of dissimulation, could not bear it any longer.

He made as his excuse the strong smell which emanated from those human remains, and going toward Charles, who, with Catherine, had stopped in front of the admiral's dead body, he said :

" Sire, does not your majesty find that this poor carcase smells so strongly that it is impossible to remain near it any longer ? "

" Do you find it so, Harry ? " inquired the king, his eyes sparkling with ferocious joy.

" Yes, sire."

" Well, then, I am not of your opinion ; the corpse of a dead enemy always smells sweet."

" Come, come, sire ! " said Catherine, who, in spite of the perfume with which she was covered, began to be incommoded with the putrid odor. " Come, however agreeable company may be, it must be left at last ; let us therefore bid adieu to the admiral, and return to Paris."

She made with her head an ironical gesture, in imitation of a leave-taking from a friend, and, going to the front of the columns, regained the road, while the cortege defiled before the corpse of Coligny.

The sun was fast sinking in the horizon. The crowd followed so rapidly, that in

ten minutes after the departure of the king there was no person about the mutilated carcase of the admiral, which was now blown upon by the first breezes of the evening.

When we say no person, we mistake. A gentleman, mounted on a black horse, and who, doubtless, could not contemplate at his ease the misshapen and mutilated trunk when it was honored by the presence of princes, had remained behind, and was examining, in all their details, the bolts, stone pillars, chains, and so on, of the gibbet, which no doubt appeared to him (but lately arrived in Paris, and ignorant of the perfection to which things could be brought in the capital) the paragon of all that man could invent of the outrageously disgusting.

We need hardly inform our friends that this individual in ecstasy before the handiwork of Enguerrand de Marigny, was M. Annibal de Coconnas.

The eye of a female had in vain sought him in the ranks; but this eye was not the only one that sought M. de Coconnas; another gentleman, remarkable from his white satin doublet and flowing plume, after having gazed around him on all sides, at length caught sight of the tall figure of Coconnas and the vast outline of his horse, and then the gentleman in the white satin doublet left the line which the main body was taking, and turning to the right, and describing a semicircle, returned toward the gibbet. Almost at the same moment, the lady, whom we have recognized for the Duchesse de Nevers, approached Marguerite and said to her:

"We were both deceived, Marguerite; for the Piedmontese has remained behind, and M. de la Mole has followed him."

"Mordi!" replied Marguerite, laughing, "then something is going to happen. Ma foi! I confess I shall not be sorry to have occasion to change my opinion."

Marguerite then turned round, and saw La Mole execute the maneuver we have described.

Then the two princesses quitted the main body, at the first favorable occasion, and turned down a path, bordered on both sides by hedges, which led back to within thirty paces of the gibbet. Madame de Nevers said a word in her captain's ear, Marguerite made a sign to Gillonne, and the four persons went by the cross road to ensconce themselves behind the bushes nearest to the spot in which was to pass the scene they desired to witness.

Marguerite alighted, as did Madame de Nevers and Gillonne, and the captain, in his turn, who took charge of the four horses. A space in the hedge allowed the three women to see all that passed.

La Mole had reached Coconnas, and, stretching out his hand, tapped him on the shoulder.

The Piedmontese turned round.

"Oh!" said he, "then it was not a dream! You are still alive!"

"Yes, sir," replied La Mole; "yes, I am still alive. It is no fault of yours, but I am still alive."

"Mordi! I know you again well enough," replied Coconnas, "in spite of your pale face. You were redder than that the last time we met!"

"And I," said La Mole; "I also recognize you, in spite of that yellow line across your face. You were paler than that when I made that mark for you!"

Coconnas bit his lips, but, resolved on continuing the conversation in a tone of irony, he said:

"It is curious, is it not, Monsieur de la Mole, particularly for a Huguenot, to be able to look at the admiral suspended from an iron hook? And yet they say that we are guilty of killing even the small Huguenots, who were sucking at the breast."

"Comte," said La Mole, bowing, "I am no longer a Huguenot; I have the happiness to be a Catholic!"

"Bah!" exclaimed Coconnas, bursting into loud laughter; "you are a convert—eh, sir? Well, that's well managed!"

"Sir," replied La Mole, with the same seriousness and the same politeness, "I made a vow to become a convert if I escaped the massacre."

"Comte," said the Piedmontese, "that was a very prudent vow, and I beg to congratulate you. Made you no others?"

"Yes," answered La Mole, "I made a second." And as he said so, he patted his horse with entire coolness.

"And what might that be?" inquired Coconnas.

"To hang you up there, by that small nail which seems to await you beneath M. de Coligny."

"What, as I am now?" asked Coconnas, "alive and merry?"

"No, sir; but after having passed my sword through your body!"

Coconnas became purple, and his eyes darted flames.

"You are not tall enough to do it, my little sir!"

"Then I'll get on your horse, my great manslayer," replied La Mole. "Ah, you believe, my dear M. Annibal de Coconnas, that one may with impunity assassinate people under the loyal and honorable cover of a hundred to one, forsooth! But the day comes when a man finds his man; and I believe that day has come now. I should very well like to send a bullet through your ugly head; but bah! I might miss you, for my hand is still trembling from the traitorous wounds you inflicted upon me."

"My ugly head!" shouted Coconnas, dismounting hastily. "Down — down from your horse, M. le Comte, and draw!"

And he drew his sword.

La Mole alighted as calmly as Coconnas had done so precipitately; he took off his cherry-colored cloak, laid it leisurely on the ground, drew his sword, and put himself on guard.

"Ah!" he said, as he stretched out his arm.

"Oh!" muttered Coconnas, as he did the same—for both, as it will be remembered, had been wounded in the shoulder.

A burst of laughter, ill repressed, came from the clump of bushes, and reached the ears of the two gentlemen, who were ignorant they had witnesses, and, turning round, beheld their ladies.

La Mole resumed his guard as firm as an automaton, and Coconnas crossed his blade with an emphatic Mordi!

"Ah! then now they will murder each other in real earnest if we do not interfere. There has been enough of this. Hola, gentlemen! - hola!" cried Marguerite.

"Let them be—let them be!" said Henriette, who, having seen Coconnas fight, hoped in her heart that Coconnas would make as short work with La Mole as he had done with the two nephews and the son of Mercandon.

"Oh, they are really beautiful so!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Look — they seem to breathe fire!"

And the combat, begun with railleries and mutual provocation, became silent as soon as the champions had crossed their swords. Both distrusted their strength, and each, at every quick pass, was compelled to restrain an expression of pain occasioned by his old wounds. With his eyes fixed and burning, his mouth half open, and his teeth clenched, La Mole advanced with short and firm steps toward his adversary, who, seeing in him a most skillful swordsman, retreated step by step. They both thus reached the edge of the fosse, on the other side of which were the spectators; then, as if his retreat had been only a simple stratagem to draw nearer to his lady, Coconnas took his stand, and on a motion of his blade, a little too wide, by his adversary, with the quickness of lightning, thrust in quart, and in a moment the white satin doublet of La Mole was stained with a spot of blood which kept growing larger.

"Courage!" cried the duchess.

"Ah, poor La Mole!" exclaimed Marguerite, with a cry of distress.

La Mole heard this cry, darted at the queen one of those looks which penetrate the heart even deeper than the sword's point, and taking advantage of a false parade, thrust vigorously at his adversary.

This time the two women uttered two cries which seemed like one. The point of La Mole's rapier had appeared, all covered with blood, behind Coconnas's back.

Yet neither fell. Both remained erect, looking at each other with open mouth, and feeling that on the slightest movement they may lose their balance. At

last the Piedmontese, more dangerously wounded than his adversary, and feeling his senses forsaking him with his blood, fell on La Mole, grasping him with one hand, while with the other he endeavored to unsheath his poniard. La Mole, on his part, roused all his strength, raised his hand, and let fall the pommel of his sword on Coconnas's forehead, who, stupefied by the blow, fell, but in his fall drew down his adversary with him, and both rolled into the fosse.

Then Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers, seeing that, dying as they were, they were still struggling to destroy each other, hastened toward them, followed by the captain of the guards; but before they could reach them, their hands unloosened their mutual clutch, their eyes closed, and the combatants, letting go their grasp of their weapons, stiffened as in their final agony. A large stream of blood flowed from each.

"Oh, brave, brave La Mole!" cried Marguerite, unable any longer to repress her admiration. "Ah! pardon me a thousand times for having a moment doubted your courage."

And her eyes filled with tears.

"Alas! alas!" murmured the duchess, "gallant Annibal. Did you ever see two more intrepid heroes, madame?"

And she sobbed aloud.

"Indeed they were ugly thrusts," said the captain, endeavoring to stanch the streams of blood. "Hola! you, there, come here as quickly as you can—here, I say—"

He addressed a man who, seated on a kind of tumbril, or cart, painted red, was singing a snatch of an old song.

The carter, whose repulsive exterior formed a singular contrast with the sweet and sylvan song he was singing, stopped his horse, came toward the two bodies, and looking at them, said:

"These be terrible wounds, sure enough, but I have made worse in my time."

"Who, then, are you?" inquired Marguerite, experiencing, in spite of herself, a certain vague terror which she could not overcome.

"Madame," replied the man, bowing down to the ground, "I am Maitre Caboche, headsman to the provosty of Paris, and I have come to hang up at the gibbet some companions for monsieur the admiral."

"Well! and I am the queen of Navarre," replied Marguerite, "and I bid you cast your corpses down there, spread in your cart the housings of our horses, and bring these two gentlemen softly behind us to the Louvre."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RIVAL OF MAITRE AMBROISE PARE.

THE tumbril, in which were La Mole and Coconnas, took the road to the Louvre, following at a distance the group that served as a guide. It stopped at the Louvre, and the driver was amply rewarded. The wounded men were carried to the Duke d'Alencon's lodgings, and Maitre Ambroise Pare sent for.

When he arrived, they were both insensible.

La Mole was the least hurt of the two. The sword had pierced him below the right armpit, but without touching any vital part. As for Coconnas, he was run through the lungs, and the air that escaped from his wound made the flame of a candle waver.

Ambroise Pare would not answer for Coconnas.

Madame de Nevers was in despair. She it was who, relying on Coconnas's courage and skill, had prevented Marguerite from interposing.

In order to conceal the cause of their wounds, Marguerite, in having them transported to her brother's apartments, where one of them was already installed, said they were two gentlemen who had been thrown from their horses; but the real story became known, in consequence of the intense admiration of the captain who had witnessed the duel, and who related all the particulars, and our two heroes had soon a brilliant reputation at court.

Attended by the same surgeon, they both passed through the different stages of convalescence, arising from the different degrees of severity of their wounds.

La Mole was the first who came to himself. As for Coconnas, he was in a high fever, and his return to life was marked by all the signs of delirium.

Although in the same room as Coconnas, La Mole had not perceived his companion, or, at least, had given no indication of it. Coconnas, on the contrary, when he opened his eyes, fixed them on La Mole with an expression that proved that the blood he had lost had not modified the passions of his fiery temperament.

Coconnas thought he was dreaming, and that in this dream he saw the enemy he imagined he had twice slain. Then, that after having observed La Mole laid, like himself, on a couch, and his wounds dressed by the surgeon, he saw him rise up in bed, while he himself was still too weak to move, then get out of bed, then walk, first leaning on the surgeon's arm, and then on a cane, and, in the end, without assistance.

Coconnas, still delirious, viewed these different stages of his companion's recovery with eyes sometimes fixed, at others wandering, but always threatening.

Then arose in his mind, more wounded than his body, an insatiable thirst of vengeance. He was wholly occupied with one idea, that of procuring some weapon, and piercing this vision that so cruelly persecuted him. His clothes, stained with blood, had been placed on a chair by his bed, but were afterward removed, it being thought imprudent to leave them in his sight; but his poniard still remained on the chair, for it was imagined it would be some time before he would want to employ it.

Coconnas saw the poniard; three nights, profiting by La Mole's slumbers, he strove to reach it; three nights his strength failed him, and he fainted. At length, on the fourth night, he clutched it conclusively, and groaning with the pain of the effort, concealed the weapon beneath his pillow.

The next day he saw a new spectacle. The shade of La Mole, that every day seemed to gain strength, while he, occupied with his design, seemed to lose his—the shade of La Mole walked thoughtfully up and down the room, three or four times, then, after having adjusted his mantle, buckled on his rapier, and put on a large hat, opened the door and went out.

Coconnas breathed again. For two hours his blood circulated more freely in his veins than it had done since the duel. One day's absence of La Mole would have recalled Coconnas's senses: a week's absence would have cured him: unfortunately, La Mole returned at the end of two hours.

This re-appearance of La Mole was a poniard stab for Coconnas; and although La Mole did not return alone, Coconnas did not give a single look at his companion.

That companion was nevertheless worth being looked at.

He was a man of forty, short, thick-set, and vigorous, with black hair, cut short, and a black beard, which, contrary to the fashion of the period, thickly covered the chin; but he seemed one who cared little for the fashion.

He wore a leather jerkin, stained and spotted with blood; red hose and leggings, thick shoes coming above the ankle; a cap the same color as his stockings, and a girdle, from which hung a large knife in a leather sheath, completed his attire.

This singular personage, whose presence in the Louvre seemed so unaccountable, threw his brown mantle on a chair, and unceremoniously approached Coconnas, whose eyes, as if fascinated, remained fixed upon La Mole, who remained at the other end of the room. He looked at the sick man, and, shaking his head, said to La Mole:

"You haven't hurried yourself."

"I could not get out sooner."

"Why did not you send for me?"

"Whom had I to send?"

"True, I forgot where we are. Ah, if my prescriptions had been followed instead of those of that ass, Ambroise Pare, you would have been by this time in a condition to go in pursuit of adventures together, or exchange another sword-thrust if you liked; but we shall see. Does your friend hear reason?"

"Scarcely."

"Hold out your tongue, sir. Ah, I see there's no time to be lost. This evening I will send you a potion ready prepared: you must make him take it at three times; once at midnight, once at one o'clock, and once at two."

"Very well."

"But who will administer it?"

"I will."

"You yourself?"—"Yes."

"You promise me?"—"On my honor."

"And if the doctor seeks to obtain any of it to analyze it?"

"I will throw it away to the last drop."

"On your honor?"—"I swear it!"

"Done; but how get it in here? Oh, faith, I'll send it to you as from Maitre Rene, the perfumer. He poaches on my profession so often, I may surely use his name for once."

"Then," said La Mole, "I rely on you."

"You may."

"And as for the payment?"

"Oh, we will arrange about that when the gentleman is well again."

"You may be quite easy on that score, for I am sure he will pay you nobly."

"No doubt. Adieu, then, M. de la Mole. In two hours you will have the potion. You understand, it must be given at midnight, in three doses, from hour to hour."

So saying, he left the room, and La Mole was alone with Coconnas.

Coconnas had heard the whole conversation, but remembered nothing except the word "Midnight."

He continued to watch La Mole, who remained in the room, pacing thoughtfully up and down.

The unknown doctor kept his word, and at the appointed time sent the potion, which La Mole placed on a small heater, and then lay down.

The clock struck twelve. Coconnas opened his eyes; his breath seemed to scorch his lips, and his throat was parched with fever; the night lamp shed a faint light, and made thousands of phantoms dance before his eyes.

He then saw La Mole rise from his couch, walk about a few moments, and then advance toward him, threatening him, as he had thought, with his clenched hand. Coconnas seized his poniard, and prepared to plunge it into his enemy.

La Mole approached.

Coconnas murmured:

"Ah! 'tis you—'tis you, then! Ah! you menace me! you threaten me! you smile! Come, come, come, that I may kill you."

And suiting the action to the word, as La Mole leaned toward him, Coconnas drew the poniard from under his clothes: but the effort exhausted him, and he fell back upon his pillow.

"Come, come," said La Mole, supporting him, "drink this, my poor fellow, for you are burned up."

It was in reality a cup that La Mole presented to Coconnas, and which he had mistaken for his fist.

But at the nectarous sensation of this blessed draught, soothing his lips, and cooling his throat, Coconnas resumed his reason, or rather his instinct; a feeling of delight pervaded his frame; he fixed his eyes on La Mole, who was supporting him in his arms, and smiled gratefully on him; and from those orbs, so lately glowing with fury, a tear rolled down his burning cheek.

"Mordi!" murmured Coconnas. "If I get over this, M. de la Mole, you shall be my friend."

"And you will get over it," said La Mole, "if you will drink the other two cups, and have no more ugly dreams."

An hour afterward La Mole, obedient to his instructions, rose again, poured a second dose into the cup, and carried it to Coconnas, who, instead of receiving him with his poniard, opened his arms, eagerly swallowed the potion, and then fell asleep.

The third cup had a no less marvelous effect. The sick man's breathing became more regular, his limbs supple, a gentle perspiration diffused itself over his skin, and when Ambroise Pare visited him the next morning, he smiled complacently:

"I answer for M. de Coconnas now: and this will not be one of the least difficult cures I have effected."

The result of this scene was the friendship of the two gentlemen, which, commencing at La belle Etoile, and violently interrupted by the night of St. Bartholomew, now surpassed that of Orestes and Pylades by five sword-thrusts and one pistol-wound exchanged between them.

Old and new wounds, slight or serious, were at last in a fair way of cure. La Mole, though quite well, would not forsake his post of nurse until Coconnas was also recovered. He raised him in bed, and helped him when he began to walk, until by the aid of Count Annibal's naturally vigorous constitution he was restored to perfect convalescence.

However, one and the same thought occupied both the young men. Each had in his delirium seen the woman he loved approach his couch, and yet, since they had recovered their senses, neither Marguerite nor Madame de Nevers had appeared. It is true that the gentleman who had witnessed the combat had come several times, as if of his own accord, to inquire after them; it is also true that Gillonne had done the same; but La Mole had not ventured to speak to the one concerning the queen: Coconnas had not ventured to speak to the other of Madame de Nevers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VISIT.

DURING some time the two young men kept their secret confined each to his own breast. At last, on a day of warm and mutual feeling, the thought which had so long occupied them escaped their lips and both cemented their friendship by this final proof, without which there is no friendship—namely, perfect confidence.

They were both madly in love—one with a princess, and the other with a queen.

They both, as they recovered from their illness, took great pains with their personal appearance. Every man, even the most indifferent to physical appearance, has, at certain times, mute interviews with his looking-glass, signs of intelligence, after which he generally quits his confidant, quite satisfied with the conversation. Now our two young friends were not men whose mirrors gave them no encouragement. La Mole, thin, pale, and elegant, had the beauty of distinction; Coconnas, powerful, large-framed, and fresh-colored, had the beauty of strength. He had more, for his recent illness had been of advantage to him. He had become thinner, grown paler; and the famous scar, which had formerly left across his face the prismatic colors of the rainbow, had disappeared.

The most delicate attentions continued to be lavished on the two wounded men, and on the day when each was well enough to rise, he found a *robe-de-chambre* on the arm of his easy chair: on the day when he was able to dress himself, a complete suit of clothes; moreover, in the pocket of each doublet was a well-filled purse, which they each intended, as a matter of course, to return, in time and place, to the unknown protector who watched over them.

This unknown protector could not be the prince with whom the two young men resided, for not only the prince had never once paid them a visit, but he had not even sent to make any inquiry after them.

A vague hope whispered to each heart that this unknown protector was the woman he loved. The two wounded men therefore awaited with intense impatience the moment when they could go out. La Mole, stronger and sooner cured than Coconnas, could have done so long before, but a kind of tacit convention bound him to his friend.

At length, after two months passed in convalescence and confinement, the long-looked-for day arrived, and about two o'clock in the afternoon, on a fine day in autumn, such as Paris sometimes offers to her astonished population, who have already made up their minds to the winter, the two friends, leaning on each other's arms, quitted the Louvre.

La Mole undertook to be the guide of Coconnas, and Coconnas allowed himself to be guided without resistance or reflection. He knew that his friend meant to conduct him to the unknown doctor's, whose potion (not patented) had cured him in a single night, when all the drugs

of Master Ambroise Pare were killing him slowly. He had divided the money in his purse into two parts, and intended a hundred rose-nobles for the unknown Esculapius, to whom his recovery was due. Coconnas was not afraid of death, but Coconnas was not the less satisfied to be alive and well.

La Mole directed his steps toward the Place des Halles. Near the ancient fountain was an octagon stone building, surmounted by a vast lantern of wood, which was again surmounted by a pointed roof, on the top of which was a weathercock. This wooden lantern had eight openings, traversed, as that heraldic piece which they call the *fascis* traverses the field of blazonry, by a kind of wheel of wood, which was divided in the middle, in order to admit in the holes cut in it for that purpose the head and hands of the sentenced person or persons who were exposed at one or other of all these eight openings.

This singular construction, which had nothing like it in the surrounding buildings, was called the pillory.

An ill-constructed, irregular, crooked, one-eyed, limping house, the roof covered with moss, like the skin of a leper, had, like a toadstool, sprung up at the foot of this species of tower.

This house was the executioner's.

A man was exposed, and was thrusting out his tongue at the passers-by; he was one of the robbers who had been following his profession beneath the gibbet of Montfaucon, and had by ill-luck been arrested in the exercise of his functions.

Coconnas believed that his friend had brought him to see this singular spectacle, and mingled in the crowd of amateurs who replied to the grimaces of the patient by vociferations and shouts. Coconnas was naturally cruel, and the sight very much amused him; and when the moving lantern was turning on its base, in order to show the exhibited to another portion of the multitude, and the crowd were following, Coconnas would have accompanied them, had not La Mole checked him, saying, in a low tone:

"It was not for this that we came here." And he led Coconnas to a small window in the house which abutted on the tower, and at which a man was leaning.

"Ah!—ah! is it you, messeigneurs?" said the man, raising his blood-red cap, and showing his black and thick hair, which descended to his eyebrows. "You are welcome."

"Who is this man?" inquired Coconnas, endeavoring to recollect, for he believed he had seen his face during one of the crises of his fever.

"Your preserver, my dear friend," replied La Mole; "he who brought to you at the Louvre that refreshing drink which did you so much good."

"Oh, oh!" said Coconnas; "in that case, my friend—"

And he held out his hand to him.

But the man, instead of returning the gesture, stood up and retreated a pace from the two friends.

"Sir," he said to Coconnas, "thanks for the honor you offer me, but it is most probable that if you knew me you would not vouchsafe it."

"Ma foi!" said Coconnas; "I declare that, even if you were the devil himself, I am very greatly obliged to you, for I owe you my life."

"I am not exactly the devil," replied the man in the red cap; "but yet there are frequently persons who would rather see the devil than me."

"Then, who are you?" asked Coconnas.

"Sir," replied the man, "I am Maitre Caboche, the executioner of the provostry of Paris—"

"Ah—" said Coconnas, withdrawing his hand.

"You see!" said Maitre Caboche.

"No, no; I will touch your hand, or may the devil fetch me! Hold it out—"

"Really?"

"Most certainly."

"Here it is!"

"Open it—wider—wider!"

And Coconnas took from his pocket the handful of gold he had prepared for his anonymous physician, and placed it in the executioner's hand.

"I would rather have had your hand entirely and solely, and Maitre Caboche, shaking his head; "for I am not in want of money, but of hands to touch mine. Never mind! God bless you, gentlemen!"

"So, then, my friend," said Coconnas, looking at the executioner with curiosity, "it is you who give men pain, who put them on the wheel, rack them, cut off heads, and break bones. Ah, ah! I am very glad to have formed your acquaintance."

"Sir," said Maitre Caboche, "I do not do all myself: just as you have lackeys, you noble gentlemen, to do what you do not choose to do yourself, so have I my assistants, who do the coarser work and make preparations. Only when, by chance, I have to do with folks of quality, like you and that other gentleman, for instance, ah! it is then a very different thing, and I take a pride in doing everything myself, from first to last—that is to say, from the first putting of the *question*, to the beheading!"

In spite of himself, Coconnas felt a shudder pervade his veins, as if the actual wedge was being driven beside his legs—as if the edge of the ax was against his neck.

La Mole, without being able to account for it, felt the same sensation. But Coconnas overcame the emotion, of which he was ashamed, and desirous of taking leave of Maitre Caboche with a jest on his lips said to him:

"Well, master, I hold you to your word, and when it is my turn to mount the gallows of Enguerrand de Marigny, or the scaffold of M. de Nemours, you alone shall lay hands on me."

"I promise you."

"Then, this time here is my hand, as a pledge that I accept your promise," said Coconnas.

And he extended to the headsman his hand, which the headsman touched timidly with his own, although it was evident that he had a great desire to grasp it warmly.

At this light touch, Coconnas turned rather pale; but a smile still remained on his lips, while La Mole, ill at ease, and seeing the crowd turn with the lantern and come toward them, touched his cloak.

Coconnas, who in reality had as great desire as La Mole to put an end to this scene, nodded to the executioner, and went his way.

"Ma foi!" said La Mole, when he and his companion had reached the Cross du Trahoir, "we breathe more freely here than in the Place des Halles!"

"Decidedly," replied Coconnas; "but I am not the less glad at having made Maitre Caboche's acquaintance. It is well to have friends everywhere."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABODE OF MAITRE RENE, PERFUMER TO THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

At the period of this history there existed in Paris, for passing from one part of the city to another, but five bridges, some of stone and the others of wood, and they all led to the Cité; among these five bridges, each of which has its history, we shall now speak more particularly of the Pont Saint Michel.

In the midst of the houses which bordered the line of the bridge, facing a small islet, was a house remarkable for its panels of wood, over which a large roof impended, like the lid of an immense eye. At the only window which opened on the first story, over the window and door of the groundfloor, closely shut, was observable a reddish light, which attracted the attention of the passers-by to the low facade, large and painted blue, with rich gold moldings. A kind of frieze, which separated the ground-floor from the first-floor, represented groups of devils in the most grotesque postures imaginable; and a large plain strip, painted blue like the facade, ran between the frieze and the window, with this inscription: "Rene, Florentine, Perfumer to Her Majesty the Queen-Mother."

The door of this shop was, as we have said, closely bolted; but it was defended from nocturnal attacks better than by bolts by the reputation of its occupant, so redoubtable that the passengers over

the bridge usually kept away from contact with the building, as if they feared the very smell of the perfumes that might exhale from the house.

From similar motives, the neighbors right and left of René had quitted their houses, which were thus entirely deserted; yet, in spite of this solitude, belated passers-by had frequently seen, glittering through the crevices of the shutters of these empty habitations, certain rays of light, and had heard certain noises like groans, which proved that some beings frequented these abodes, although they did not know if they belonged to this world or the other.

It was, doubtless, owing to the privilege which the dread of him, widely circulated, had procured for him, that Maitre Rene had dared to keep up a light after the prescribed hour. No round or guard, however, would have dared to molest him, a man doubly dear to her majesty as her fellow-countryman and perfumer.

The shop of the ground-floor had been dark and deserted since eight o'clock in the evening—the hour at which it closed, not again to open until next morning, and it was there was the daily sale of perfumery, unguents, cosmetics, and all the articles of a skillful chemist. Two apprentices aided him in the retail business, but did not sleep in the house.

In the evening they went out an instant before the shop was closed, and in the morning waited at the door until it was opened.

In the shop, which was large and deep, there were two doors, each leading to a staircase. One of these staircases was in the wall itself, and the other was exterior and visible from the Quai des Augustins, and from what is now called the Quai des Orfevres.

Both led to a room on the first-floor, of the same size as the ground-floor, except that it was divided into two compartments by tapestry suspended in the center. At the end of the first compartment opened the door which led to the exterior staircase. On the side face of the second opened the door of the secret staircase. This door was invisible; being concealed by a large carved cupboard fastened to it by iron clamps, and moving with it when pushed open. Catherine alone, besides Rene, knew the secret of this door, and by it she came and departed; and with eye or ear placed against the cupboard, in which were several small holes, she saw and heard all that passed in the chamber.

Two other doors, visible to all eyes, presented themselves at the sides of the second compartment. One opened to a small chamber lighted from the roof, and having nothing in it but a large stove, alembics, retorts, and crucibles: it was an alchemist's laboratory; the other opened on to a cell more singular than the rest of the apartment, for it was not lighted at all—had neither carpet nor furniture, but only a kind of stone altar.

The floor sloped from the center to the ends, and from the ends to the base of the wall was a kind of gutter ending in a funnel, through whose orifice might be seen the somber waters of the Seine. On nails driven into the walls were suspended instruments of singular shape, all keen and trenchant, with points as fine as a needle and edges as sharp as a razor: some shone like mirrors; others, on the contrary, were of a dull gray or murky blue. In a corner were two black fowls, struggling with each other and tied together by the claws. This was the Sanctuary of Augury.

Let us return to the middle chamber, that with two compartments.

It was here that the vulgar clients were introduced: here were Ibises of Egypt: mummies, with gilded bands; the crocodile, yawning from the ceiling; death's heads, with eyeless sockets and gumless teeth; and here, old musty volumes, torn and rat-eaten, were presented to the eye of the visitor in pell-mell confusion. Behind the curtain were phials, singularly shaped boxes, and vases of curious construction; all lighted up by two small silver lamps which, supplied with perfumed oil, cast their yellow flame around the somber vault, to which each was suspended by three blackened chains.

Rene, alone, his arms crossed, was pacing up and down the second compartment

with long strides, and shaking his head. After a lengthened and painful musing he paused before an hour glass.

"Ah! ah!" he said, "I forgot to turn it; and perhaps the sand has all passed a long time since."

Then, looking at the moon, as it struggled through a heavy black cloud which seemed to hang over Notre-Dame, he said:

"It is nine o'clock. If she comes, she will come, as usual, in an hour or an hour and a half: then there will be time for all."

At this moment a noise was heard on the bridge. Rene applied his ear to the long tube, the extremity of which reached unto the street.

"No," he said, "it is neither *she* nor *they*: it is men's footsteps, and they stop at my door—they are coming hither."

And three knocks were heard at the door.

Rene rapidly descended, and placed his ear against the door, without opening it.

The blows were repeated.

"Who's there?" asked Rene.

"Is it necessary that we should mention our names?" inquired a voice.

"Absolutely indispensable," replied Rene.

"Then, I am the Count Annibal de Coconnas," said the same voice.

"And I am the Count Lerac de la Mole," said another voice.

"Wait, wait a second, gentlemen, and I am at your service;" and at the same moment, Rene, drawing the bolts and lifting the bars, opened the door to the two young men only, locking it after him. Then, conducting them by the exterior staircase, he introduced them into the second compartment.

La Mole, as he entered, made the sign of the cross under his cloak. He was pale, and his hand trembled without his being able to repress this symptom of weakness.

Coconnas looked at everything, one after the other; and seeing the door of the cell, tried to open it.

"Allow me to observe, sir," said Rene, in a serious tone, and placing his hand on Coconnas's, "that those who do me the honor of a visit have only access to this apartment."

"Oh, very well," replied Coconnas; "besides, I want to sit down," and he placed himself on a chair.

There was profound silence for the next minute—Maitre Rene expecting that one or other of the young men would open the conversation.

"Maitre Rene," at length said Coconnas, "you are a very skillful man, and I pray you to tell me if I shall always remain a sufferer from my wound—that is, always experience this shortness of breath, which prevents me from riding on horseback, practicing feats of arms, and eating rich omelettes?"

Rene put his ear to Coconnas's chest, and listened attentively to the play of the lungs.

"No, comte," he replied, "you will be cured."

"Really?"

"Yes, I assure you."

"Well, I am happy to hear it."

Again, all was silent.

"Is there nothing else you would desire to know, M. le Comte?"

"I wish to know," said Coconnas, "if I am really in love?"

"You are," replied Rene.

"How do you know?"

"Because you ask the question."

"Mordi! you are right. But with whom?"

"With her who now, on every occasion, uses the oath you have just uttered."

"Ah!" said Coconnas, amazed; "Maitre Rene, you are a wonderful man! Now, La Mole, it is your turn."

La Mole blushed, and seemed embarrassed.

"I, M. Rene," he stammered, and speaking more firmly as he proceeded, "do not desire to ask you if I am in love, for I know that I am, and do not seek to conceal it from myself: but tell me, shall I be beloved in return? for, in truth, all that at first seemed propitious now turns against me."

"Perchance you have not done all you should do."

"What is there to do, sir, but to testify, by our respect and devotion to the lady of our thoughts, that she is really and profoundly beloved?"

"You know," replied Rene, "that these demonstrations are frequently very insignificant."

"Then must I despair?"

"By no means: we must have recourse to science. There are in human nature antipathies to be overcome—sympathies which may be forced. Iron is not the loadstone; but by impregnating it, we make it, in its turn, attract iron."

"Yes, yes," muttered La Mole; "but I have an objection to all these sorceries."

"Ah, then, if you have any such objections, you should not come here," answered Rene.

"Come, come, this is child's play!" interposed Coconnas. "Maitre Rene, can you show me the devil?"

"No, M. le Comte."

"I'm sorry for that; for I had a question or two to put to his dark highness, and it might have encouraged La Mole."

"Well, then, let it be so," said La Mole, "let us go to the point at once. They have spoken to me of figures modeled in wax after the resemblance of the beloved object. Is this a method?"

"An infallible one."

"And in the experiment, there is nothing which can in any way affect the life or health of the person beloved?"

"Nothing."

"Let us try, then."

"Shall I make first trial?" said Coconnas.

"No," said La Mole, "since I have begun, I will go through to the end."

At this moment, some one rapped lightly at the door—so lightly that Maitre Rene alone heard the noise for which he had been waiting.

He put, without any hesitation, his ear to the pipe, while he made several inquiries of La Mole. Then he added, suddenly:

"And then think well of your wish, and call the person whom you love."

La Mole knelt, as if about to name a divinity; and Rene, going into the other compartment, went out noiselessly by the exterior staircase, and an instant afterward, light steps trod the flooring of his shop.

La Mole rose, and beheld before him Maitre Rene. The Florentine held in his hand a small figure in wax, very indifferently modeled, and wearing a crown and mantle.

"Do you desire to be always beloved by your royal mistress?" demanded the perfumer.

"Yes, if my life—my soul, should be the sacrifice!" replied La Mole.

"Well," said the Florentine, taking with the ends of his fingers some drops of water from an ewer, sprinkling them over the figure, and muttering certain Latin words.

La Mole shuddered, believing that some sacrilege was being committed.

"What are you doing?" he inquired.

"I am christening this figure with the name of Marguerite."

"For what purpose?"

"To establish a sympathy."

Rene then traced on a small strip of red paper certain cabalistic characters, put it into the eye of a steel needle, and with the needle pierced the small wax model in the heart.

Strange to say, at the orifice of the wound appeared a small drop of blood, and then he burned a piece of paper.

The warmth of the needle melted the wax, and dried up the spot of blood.

"Thus," said Rene, "by the force of sympathy, your love shall pierce and burn the heart of the woman whom you love."

Coconnas, as the bolder spirit of the two, laughed, and in a low tone jested at the whole affair; but La Mole, amorous and superstitious, felt a cold dew start from the roots of his hair.

"And now," continued Rene, "press your lips to the lips of the figure, and say: 'Marguerite, I love thee! Come, Marguerite, come!'"

La Mole obeyed.

At this moment they heard the door of the second chamber open, and light steps approach. Coconnas, curious and incredu-

lous, drew his poniard, and fearing a rebuke from Rene if he raised the tapestry, cut a small piece out with his dagger, and applying his eye to the hole, uttered a cry of astonishment, to which two female voices responded.

"What is it?" exclaimed La Mole, nearly dropping the waxen figure, which Rene caught from his hands.

"Why," replied Coconnas, "the Duchesse de Nevers and Madame Marguerite are there!"

"Well, then, incredulous!" replied Rene, with an austere smile, "do you still doubt the force of sympathy?"

La Mole was petrified on seeing the queen; Coconnas was amazed at beholding Madame de Nevers. One believed that the sorceries of Rene had evoked the specter of Marguerite: the other, seeing the door half open, by which the lovely phantoms had entered, gave at once a worldly and substantial explanation to the mystery.

While La Mole was crossing himself and sighing, Coconnas, who had driven away all ideas of the interference of the foul fiend by the aid of his strong powers of incredulity, having observed, through the chink in the curtain, the astonishment of Madame de Nevers and the somewhat caustic smile of Marguerite, judged it to be a decisive moment, and understanding that a man may say in behalf of a friend what he cannot say for himself, instead of going to Madame de Nevers, went straight to Marguerite, and bending his knee, after the fashion of the great Artaxerxes, cried, in a voice not deficient in effect:

"Madame, this very moment, at the demand of my friend the Count de la Mole, Maitre Rene evoked your spirit; and to my utter astonishment, your spirit is accompanied with a body most dear to us, and which I recommend to my friend. Shade of her majesty the queen of Navarre, will you desire the body of your companion to come on the other side of the curtain?"

Marguerite laughed heartily, and made a sign to Henriette, who passed to the other side of the curtain.

"La Mole, my friend," continued Coconnas, "be as eloquent as Demosthenes, as Cicero, as the Chancellor de l'Hopital! and be assured that my life will be periled if you do not persuade the body of Madame de Nevers that I am her most devoted, most obedient, and most faithful servant."

"But—" stammered La Mole.

"Do as I desire! And you, Maitre Rene, watch that we are not interrupted."

Rene did as Coconnas desired him.

"Mordi! sir," said Marguerite, "you are a man of sense. I listen to you. What have you to say?"

"I have to say to you, madame, that the shadow of my friend—for he is a shadow, and he proves it by not uttering a single syllable—I say, then, that this shadow has supplicated me to use the faculty which material bodies possess, and to say to you: Lovely Shadow, the gentleman who thus lost his corporeality has lost it by the rigor of your eyes. If you were yourself, I would ask Maitre Rene to plunge me in some sulphureous hole rather than hold such language to the daughter of Henry II., the sister of King Charles IX., and the wife of the king of Navarre. But shadows are freed from all terrestrial pride, and are never haughty when they love. Therefore, pray of your body, madame, to bestow a little love on poor La Mole—a soul in trouble, if ever there was one; a soul first persecuted by friendship, which three times thrust into him several inches of cold steel; a soul burned by the fire of your eyes: fire a thousand times more consuming than all the flames of Tartarus! Have pity, then, on this poor soul! Love a little what was the handsome La Mole: and if you no longer possess speech, ah! bestow a gesture, a smile upon him. The soul of my friend is a very intelligent soul and will easily comprehend. Be kind to him, then: or, mordi! I will pass my sword through the body of Rene, in order that, by virtue of the power which he possesses over spirits, he may force yours, which he has already so opportunely evoked, to do all a shadow so amiably disposed as yours appears to be, should do."

Marguerite could not repress a burst of laughter at this tirade; yet, preserving the silence which, on such an occasion, may be supposed characteristic of a royal shade, she presented her hand to Coconnas, who took it tenderly in his own, and, calling to La Mole, said: "Shade of my friend, come hither instantly."

La Mole, amazed, overcome, silently obeyed.

"'Tis well," said Coconnas, taking him by the back of the head; "and now bring the shadow of your handsome brown countenance into contact with the white and vaporous hand before you."

And Coconnas, suiting the "action to the word," placed this most delicate hand to La Mole's lips, and kept them for a moment respectfully united, without the hand seeking to withdraw itself from the gentle pressure.

La Mole then, summoning his presence of mind, suddenly rose, and leaving the hand of Marguerite in that of Coconnas, took himself that of the Duchesse de Nevers, and bending his knee, said:

"Loveliest—most adorable of women—I speak of living women, and not of shadows!" and he turned a look and a smile to Marguerite; "allow a soul released from its mortal trappings to repair the absence of a body fully absorbed by material friendship. M. de Coconnas, whom you see, is but a man—a man of bold and hardy frame, of flesh handsome to gaze upon perchance, but perishable, like all flesh. Yet although a stalwart and right knightly gentleman, who, as you have seen, distributes as heavy blows as were ever seen in wide France—this champion, so full of eloquence in presence of a spirit, dares not accost a female body in the flesh. 'Tis therefore he has addressed the shadow of the queen, charging me to speak to your lovely body, and to tell you that he lays at your feet his soul and heart; that he entreats from your divine eyes a look in pity—from your rosy fingers, to beckon him with a sign, and from your musical and heavenly voice to say those words which he never can forget; if not, he has supplicated another thing—and that is, in case he should not soften you, you will pass, for the second time, my sword — which is a real blade, for swords have no shadows but in the sunshine—pass my sword right through his body, for he can live no longer if you do not authorize him to live exclusively for you."

Henriette's eyes (she herself had been a little jealous of Coconnas's address to the queen of Navarre) turned from La Mole, to whom she had listened, toward Coconnas, to see if the expression of that gentleman's countenance harmonized with the loveful address of his friend. It seemed that she was satisfied, for blushing, breathless, conquered, she said to Coconnas, with a smile, which disclosed a double row of pearls inclosed in coral:

"Is this true?"

"Mordi!" exclaimed Coconnas, fascinated by her look, "it is true, indeed. Oh, yes, madame, it is true—true on my life—true on my death!"

"There, then," said Henriette, extending to him her hand, while her eyes proclaimed the feelings of her heart.

Coconnas and La Mole each approached his lady-love, when suddenly the door at the bottom opened, and Rene appeared.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, in a voice which at once damped all the ardor of the lovers; "silence!"

And they heard in the solid wall the sound of a key in a lock, and of a door grating on its hinges.

"But," said Marguerite, haughtily, "I should think that no one has the right to enter while we are here!"

"Not the queen-mother?" murmured Rene in her ear.

Marguerite instantly rushed out by the exterior staircase, leading La Mole after her; Henriette and Coconnas followed them.

They all four fled, as fly at the first noise the birds we have seen engaged in loving parley on the boughs of a flowering shrub.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLACK HENS.

It was time for the two couples to disappear. Catherine turned the key in the

lock, just as Coconnas and Madame de Nevers closed the secret door, and Catherine could hear their steps on the stairs.

She cast a suspicious glance around, and then fixing her eyes on Rene, who stood motionless before her, said:

"Who was that?"

"Only some lovers, who are quite content with the assurance I gave them that they are really in love."

"Never mind them," said Catherine, shrugging her shoulders; "is there no one here?"

"No one but your majesty and myself."

"Have you done what I ordered you?"

"About the two black hens?"

"Yes!"

"They are ready, madame."

"Ah," muttered Catherine, "if you were a Jew!"

"Why a Jew, madame?"

"Because you could then read the Hebrew treatises concerning sacrifices. I have had one of them translated, and I found that it was not in the heart or liver that the Hebrews sought for omens; but in the brain, and the letters traced there by the all-powerful hand of destiny."

"Yes, madame; so I have heard from an old rabbi."

"There are," said Catherine, "characters thus marked that reveal all the future. Only the Chaldean seers recommend—"

"What?" asked Rene, seeing the queen hesitate.

"That the experiment shall be tried on the human brain, as more developed and more nearly sympathizing with the wishes of the consulter."

"Alas!" said Rene, "your majesty knows it is impossible."

"Difficult, at least," said Catherine; "if we had known this at the St. Bartholomew, what a rich harvest we might have had. But I will think of it the first time anybody is to be hanged. Meantime, let us do what we can. Is the chamber of sacrifice prepared?"

"Yes, madame."

"Let us go there."

Rene lighted a taper made of strange substances, and emitting strong odors, and preceded Catherine into the cell.

Catherine selected from among the sacrificial instruments a knife of blue steel, while Rene took up one of the fowls that were crouched in the corner.

"How shall we proceed?"

"We will examine the liver of the one and the brain of the other. If these two experiments lead to the same result with the former, we must needs be convinced."

"With which shall we commence?"

"With the liver."

"Very well," said Rene, and he fastened the bird down to two rings attached to the little altar, so that the creature, turned on its back, could only struggle, without stirring from the spot.

Catherine opened its breast with a single stroke of her knife; the fowl uttered three cries, and, after some convulsions, expired. "Always three cries!" said Catherine; "three signs of death."

She then opened the body.

"And the liver inclining to the left—always to the left, a triple death, followed by a downfall. 'Tis terrible, Rene."

"We must see, madame, whether the presages from the second correspond with those of the first."

Rene threw the dead fowl into a corner, and went toward the other, which, endeavoring to escape, and seeing itself pent up in a corner, flew suddenly over Rene's head, and in its flight extinguished the magic taper Catherine held.

"Thus shall our race be extinguished," said the queen: "death shall breathe upon it, and destroy it from the face of the earth! Yet three sons! three sons!" she murmured, sorrowfully.

Rene took from her the extinguished taper, and went to re-light it.

On his return, he found the hen huddled in a corner.

"This time," said Catherine, "I will prevent the cries, for I will cut off the head at once."

And accordingly, as soon as the hen was bound, Catherine severed the head at a single blow; but in the last agony the beak opened three times, and then closed forever.

"Seest thou," said Catherine, terrified, "instead of three cries, three sighs?—they will all three die. Let us now see the brain."

She severed the comb from the head, and carefully opening the skull, endeavored to trace a letter formed in the bloody cavities that divide the brain.

"Always so!" cried she, clasping her hands; "and this time clearer than ever; see here!" Rene approached.

"What is this letter?" asked Catherine.

"An H," replied Rene.

"How many times repeated?"

"Four," said he.

"Ay, ay! I see it! that is to say Henry IV. Oh," cried she, casting the knife from her, "I am accursed in my posterity!"

She was terrible, that woman, pale as a corpse, lighted by the dismal taper, and clasping her bloody hands.

"He will reign!" she exclaimed; "he will reign!"

"He will reign!" repeated Rene, buried in meditation.

The gloomy expression of Catherine's face soon disappeared before a sudden thought had passed through her mind.

"Rene," said she, without lifting her head from her breast, "Rene, do you recollect the terrible history of a doctor at Perugia, who killed at once, by the aid of a pomade, his daughter and his daughter's lover?"

"Yes, madame."

"And this lover—"

"Was King Ladislaus, madame."

"Ah, yes!" murmured she, "have you any account of this history?"

"I have an old book that mentions it," replied Rene.

"Well, let us go into the other chamber, and then you can show it me."

They quitted the cell, the door of which Rene closed after him.

"Has your majesty any other orders to give me concerning the sacrifices?"

"No, Rene, none; I am sufficiently satisfied for the present; only the next execution you must arrange with the executioner for the head."

Rene bowed and approached the shelves, where stood the books, reached down one of them, opened it, turned over the leaves an instant, and then handed it to the queen-mother.

Catherine sat down at a table, Rene placed the magic taper close to her, and by its dim and livid glare she read a few lines.

"Good!" said she; "this is all I wanted to know."

She rose from her seat, leaving the book on the table, but bearing away the idea that had germinated in her mind, and which would ripen there.

Rene waited respectfully, taper in hand, until the queen, who seemed about to retire, should give him fresh orders or ask fresh questions.

Catherine walked up and down several times without speaking. Then suddenly stopping before Rene, and fixing on him her eyes, round and piercing as those of a bird of prey:

"Confess you have given her some love-draught," said she.

"Whom?" asked Rene, starting.

"La Sauve."

"I, madame?" said Rene; "never!"

"Never?"

"I swear it."

"There must be some magic in it, however, for he is desperately in love with her, though he is not famous for his constancy."——"Who, madame?"

"He, Henry the accursed—he who is to succeed my three sons—he who shall one day sit upon the throne of France, and be called Henry IV., and is yet the son of Jeanne d'Albret."

And Catherine accompanied these words with a sigh that made Rene shudder, for he thought of the famous gloves he had prepared by Catherine's order for the queen of Navarre.

"He runs after her still, then?" said Rene.

"Still," replied the queen.

"I thought that the king of Navarre was quite in love with his wife now."

"All a farce, Rene. I know not why, but everybody is seeking to deceive me. My daughter Marguerite is leagued

against me; perhaps, she, too, is looking forward to her brother's death; perhaps, she, too, hopes to be queen of France."

"Perhaps so," re-echoed Rene, resuming his own reverie.

"Ha! we shall see," said Catherine, advancing toward the great door, for she doubtless judged it useless to descend the secret stair, after Rene's assurance that they were alone.

René preceded her, and in a few minutes they stood in the laboratory of the perfumer.

"You promised me some fresh cosmetics for my hands and lips, Rene; the winter is approaching, and you know how tender my skin is."

"I have already thought of that, madame; and I intended to bring you some to-morrow."

"I shall not be visible before nine o'clock to-morrow evening; I shall be occupied with my devotions during the day."

"I will be at the Louvre at nine o'clock, then, madame."

"Madame de Sauve has beautiful hands and lips," said Catherine, in a careless tone. "What pomade does she use?"

"Heliotrope."

"For her hands?"

"Yes."

"What for her lips?"

"She is going to try a new composition of my invention, and of which I intended to bring your majesty a box at the same time."

Catherine mused an instant.

"She is certainly very beautiful," said she, pursuing her secret thoughts, "and the passion of the Béarnais for her is astonishing."

"And so devoted to your majesty," said Rene.

Catherine shrugged her shoulders.

"When a woman loves, is she faithful to any one but her lover?—You must have given her some love-spell, Rene."

"I swear I have not, madame."

"Well, well; we'll say no more about it. Show me this opiate you spoke of, that is to make her lips still more rosy."

Rene approached a drawer, and showed Catherine six small silver boxes of a round shape, ranged side by side.

"This is the only spell she ever asked me for," observed Rene; "it is true, as your majesty says, I have composed it expressly for her, for her lips are so tender that the sun and wind affect them equally."

Catherine opened one of the boxes; it contained a beautiful carmine paste.

"Give me some paste for my hands, Rene," said she; "I will take it away with me, for I have none."

Rene took the taper, and went to seek, in a private drawer, what the queen asked for. As he turned, he fancied that he saw the queen conceal a box under her mantle; he was, however, too familiar with these habits of the queen to affect to perceive the movement; so wrapping the cosmetic she demanded in a paper bag, ornamented with fleurs-de-lis:

"Here it is, madame," he said.

"Thanks, Rene," returned the queen; then, after a moment's silence: "Do not give Madame de Sauve that paste for a few days; I wish to make the first trial of it myself."

And she approached the door.

"Shall I have the honor of escorting your majesty?" asked Rene.

"Only to the end of the bridge," replied Catherine; "my gentlemen and my litter wait for me there."

They left the house, and at the end of the Rue Barillerie four gentlemen on horseback and a plain litter were in attendance.

On his return, Rene's first care was to count his boxes of opiates — one was wanting.

CHAPTER XXI.

MADAME DE SAUVE'S CHAMBER.

CATHERINE had calculated rightly in supposing that Henry would speedily resume his habit of passing his evenings with Madame de Sauve. 'Tis true that the utmost caution was at first observed in making these visits, but by degrees all precaution was laid aside, and so openly did the king of Navarre avow his prefer-

ence for the society of Madame de Sauve, that Catherine experienced not the smallest difficulty in ascertaining that, however her daughter Marguerite might claim the title of his queen, the real sovereign of his affections was the fair Charlotte.

We have already made a slight mention of these apartments, but for the reader's better information we will state that they were situated on the second floor of the palace, almost immediately above those occupied by Henry himself, and in common with the suites of rooms occupied by such as were officially employed by the royal family, were small, dark, and inconvenient; the door opened upon a corridor, feebly lighted by an arched window at the further end, but so completely did the cumbrous sashes interfere with the purpose for which the window in question had been, no doubt, originally intended, that it was only during a few hours of a sunshiny day that a few straggling rays gained admittance; during winter it was necessary to light the lamp placed at the end by two o'clock in the day, and the said lamp only containing a certain portion of oil, it followed, as a matter of course, that by the hour of Henry's usual visit it was exhausted, leaving the whole corridor in a state of darkness.

The suite of rooms devoted to the service of Madame de Sauve consisted of a small antechamber, hung with yellow damask; a receiving-room, with hangings of blue velvet; a sleeping-room, with its bed of curiously carved wood, heavy curtains of rose-colored satin, and tester composed of looking-glass, set in silver, and paintings representing the loves of Venus and Adonis; such was the residence, or rather nest, of the lovely Charlotte de la Sauve, lady-in-waiting to her majesty Queen Catherine.

A more careful examination of the apartment we have just been describing discovered a toilet abundantly and luxuriously provided with all the accessories of female beauty; nearly opposite to which was a small door opening into a kind of oratory, where, at an elevation of two steps from the ground, stood a carved *prie-dieu*. Against the walls were suspended three or four paintings, representing the most striking passages in the lives of the saints, mingled with arms for female use, both offensive and defensive; for in these times of mysterious intrigue, women carried arms as well as men, and very frequently employed them as skillfully.

The evening on which we have introduced the reader to Madame de Sauve's apartments was the one following the scenes in which Maitre Rene had played so conspicuous a part; and the fair Charlotte, seated beside Henry in her sleeping chamber, was eloquently discoursing of her fears and affection, and touched on the devotion she had exhibited the night succeeding the massacre of St. Bartholomew—the only night Henry had passed in Marguerite's apartments.

Henry, meanwhile, though duly grateful for the deep interest expressed for him by the beautiful creature, who looked more than usually captivating in the simple white peignoir in which she was robed, was more grave and thoughtful than exactly satisfied Madame de Sauve, who had strictly obeyed Catherine's injunctions to evince the most extreme affection for Henry. She eagerly and searchingly gazed upon him, as though to ascertain how far his words and looks agreed.

"Charlotte," said Henry, at last, roused by her manner from his meditative mood, "there is one question I want to ask you, and I trust to you to answer me truly. How comes it, that, all at once, I find you listening so readily to my suit, and lavishing upon so unworthy a creature as myself the rich treasures of that love I so earnestly, though vainly, sought to obtain before my marriage? Something whispers to me that I am indebted to the interference of her majesty Queen Catherine for the delightful change I experience."

Madame blushed, and hastily exclaimed, "For Heaven's sake, speak not so loud when you name the queen-mother!"

"Nay," answered Henry, with such an air of confidence as to deceive even Madame de Sauve herself, "there was a time

when such caution was requisite; but now that I am her daughter's husband, the case is different."

"Ah, Henry!" replied Madame de Sauve, "you have been sporting with my credulity in persuading me you love me; 'tis too plain you have bestowed your affections with your hand—on Madame Marguerite."

Henry smiled.

"There!" exclaimed Madame de Sauve, "you smile so provokingly, that I feel as though I could quarrel with you, and forbid you ever to see my face again! May I request to be informed what your majesty meant by saying that you owed my love to the orders of the queen-mother?"

"Why, I meant this, sweetheart, and nothing more: that, though your heart felt inclined to return my love, you durst not listen to its dictates till authorized by Catherine herself. But be content, and believe that I fully return your affection; and for that reason, I will not confide to you the secret working of my thoughts, lest you should be a sufferer; for the friendship of the queen is unstable—there is no dependence on it—it is just the uncertain, changeable regard of a mother-in-law."

This was not the point at which Charlotte aimed; and it seemed to her as though an impenetrable barrier arose to separate her from her lover directly she attempted to sound the fathomless recesses of his heart. Her eyes filled with tears, but just as she was about to reply, ten o'clock struck.

"Your majesty will pardon me for reminding you that it is late; and I am required to be early in my attendance on the queen-mother to-morrow morning."

"In other words, you are tired of my company, and want to get rid of me; eh, pretty one? Is it not so?" said Henry.

"Nay," answered Charlotte, "I am somewhat indisposed to-night; and as I fear I may be led to say what it may displease your majesty to hear, I would humbly request you to retire and leave me to my own sad thoughts."

"Well!" cried Henry, "be it as you will; but by way of recompense for my obedience, will you not allow me to be present while that beautiful hair is arranged for the night?"

"Does not your majesty fear the displeasure of Queen Marguerite, should you protract your departure?"

"Charlotte," answered Henry, with a serious air, "we agreed never to allude to or mention the name of the queen of Navarre, and it seems to me as though, to-night, we had talked of nothing else."

Madame de Sauve arose with a sigh, and seated herself before her toilet-table, while Henry, drawing a chair beside her, placed one knee on the seat, and leaning on the back, exclaimed:

"Mercy on us! what a heap of wonderful things you have here, my pretty Charlotte!—scent-bottles, powders, pots of perfume, odoriferous pastilles, phials, washes. Who would think so many accessories were requisite ere beauty could be made perfect?"

"Still," replied Charlotte, "it seems that my toilet lacks that one needful embellishment that would enable me to reign exclusively over your majesty's heart!"

"Come, come, sweetheart," interrupted Henry, "do not let us fall back upon past subjects, but tell me—for I am dying to know—what is the use of this delicately small pencil? Now, if I were good at guessing, I would venture to ask if it were intended to trace out the arched brow of my beautiful Charlotte?"

"Your majesty has guessed most successfully; 'tis even as you say, for marking more perfectly the form of the eyebrow."

"Then reward my skill by explaining the purport of this little ivory rake?"

"To form a perfect and accurate division of the roots of the hair."

"And this charming little silver box, with the lid so elegantly wrought and embossed?"

"That, sire, was sent to me from Rene; it contains the lip salve so long promised by him, to embellish the lips your majesty has ere now deigned to admire."

And with a view to exhibit the cosmetic in question to Henry, Charlotte took the

little box containing it in her hands, but, just as she was about to open it, a sudden knocking at the door made the lovers start.

"Madame," said Dariole, introducing her head through the curtains that hung before the entrance to the chamber, "some one knocks."

"Go, see who it is, and return quickly," said her mistress.

During the absence of the confidante, Henry and Charlotte exchanged looks of considerable alarm; the former contemplating a hasty retreat to the oratory, which had before now afforded him a safe hiding-place when similarly surprised.

"Madame!" cried Dariole, "'tis Maitre Rene, the perfumer."

At this name, a frown darkened the brow of Henry and his lips were suddenly and involuntarily compressed.

"Shall I send him away?" asked Charlotte.

"By no means," answered Henry; "Maitre Rene is one of those persons who do nothing without a motive; his coming hither is for some design or reason; therefore admit him without hesitation."

"Will your majesty choose to conceal yourself?"

"On no account," replied Henry; "for Master Rene, from whom nothing is hid, knows perfectly well of my being here."

"But are there not reasons why his presence should be unpleasant to your majesty?"

"No!" answered Henry, vainly striving to conceal his emotion; "none whatever; 'tis true there was a coolness between us; but since the night of St. Bartholomew we have made up all our differences."

"Show Maitre Rene in," said Madame de Sauve to Dariole.

And the next instant Rene entered the chamber, casting around him a quick searching glance, that took in the assembled group as well as every trifling circumstance. He found Madame de Sauve sitting before her toilet, and Henry reclining on the sofa at the opposite end of the room, so that while the full light fell upon Charlotte, Henry remained in shadow.

"Madame," said Rene, with a sort of respectful freedom—"I come to offer my apologies to you."

"And wherefore, my good Rene?" asked Madame de Sauve, with that air of pleased coquetry with which a pretty woman beholds the means of rendering her beauty still more striking.

"For having thus long delayed fulfilling my promise of inventing a fresh beautifier for those lovely lips—and—"

"And for deferring the performance of that promise until this very day?—that is what you mean, is it not, my worthy Maitre Rene?" inquired Charlotte.

"This day?" repeated Rene.

"Yes, indeed, 'twas but this evening, not long since, I received this box from you."

"Ah, truly: I had indeed forgotten it," said Rene, gazing with a singular expression on the small box of lip-salve lying on Madame de Sauve's toilet-table, and which exactly resembled those in his shop: "and may I inquire whether you have yet made trial of it?"

"Not yet; I was just about to do so when you entered."

Rene's countenance became thoughtful, a change which did not escape the observation of Henry, whom, indeed, few things escaped.

"What ails you, Rene?" inquired the king.

"Nothing, sire," answered Rene. "I was but waiting till your majesty should condescend to address me, ere I took my leave of Madame la Baronne."

"Nay, nay," answered Henry, smilingly, "you need no words of mine to assure yourself that I am always happy to see you. What say you, Rene?—did you doubt that?"

Rene glanced around him, and seemed as though searchingly examining each nook and corner of the apartment; then, suddenly ceasing his survey, he so placed himself as to bring both Madame de Sauve and Henry within his gaze.

Warned by that admirable instinct which in Henry formed almost a sixth

sense, the king felt persuaded that some strange and conflicting struggle was going on in the mind of the perfumer, and hastily turning round, so as to throw his own features into shade, while those of the Florentine were fully revealed, he said: "By the way, what brings you here so late to-night, Maitre Rene?"

"Have I been so unfortunate as to disturb your majesty by my visit?" replied the perfumer, retreating backward to the door.

"Not in the least, I promise you; but I should like to know one thing."

"What is that, sire?"

"Whether you expected to find me here."—"I was quite sure your majesty was nowhere else."

"You were seeking me, probably?"

"I am at least very happy to have met your majesty."

"You have something to say to me?" persisted Henry: "come, come, 'tis useless seeking to deny it."

"'Tis possible I have somewhat to say to your majesty," said Rene.

Charlotte blushed, and a dread lest the revelation the perfumer seemed tempted to make to Henry might relate to her previous conduct toward the king, made her desirous of cutting short the conversation; feigning, therefore, so entire an absorption in the duties of her toilet as not to have heard a word that had passed, she suddenly broke in upon it, by exclaiming, as she opened the box of lip salve:

"Rene, you are a dear good man, to have made me this beautiful ointment; and, now I think of it, it will be an excellent opportunity to make use of it while you are here, that you may assist me with your valuable aid and direction as to the right mode of employing it."

So saying, she dipped the tip of her finger in the vermilion paste, and was just about to raise it to her lips.

Rene shuddered, and half extended his arm to prevent her. The hand of the baronne had almost touched her lips.

Henry, concealed in deep shadow, marked well the action of the one and the start of the other.

Rene became ghastly pale as the distance between the finger of Charlotte and her lips were diminished to the smallest possible space; then suddenly springing forward, he arrested her arm at the very instant that Henry arose with the same intention. The king instantly fell back on the sofa, without the slightest noise.

"One moment, madame!" cried Rene, with a forced smile, "but this salve must not be used without very particular directions?"

"And who will supply me with these directions?"

"I will."

"And when?"

"Directly I have finished saying what I have to say to his majesty the king of Navarre."

Charlotte opened her eyes with amazement at the singular and mysterious conversation which was being carried on without her understanding a word of its import, and she continued in mute astonishment, holding the pot of salve in one hand, and gazing on the extremity of the finger tinged by the roseate ointment she had intended for her lips.

Meanwhile, Henry arose, and moved by an idea which, like all the thoughts of the young king, had two sides, the one apparently superficial, and the other deep and profound, went straight to Charlotte, and taking her hand, reddened as it was with the ointment, feigned to be about to carry it to his lips.

"Wait one minute!" exclaimed Rene, eagerly; "but an instant! Be kind enough, madame, to wash your beautiful hands with this Naples soap, which I quite forgot to send when I sent the salve, but which I now have the honor of presenting to you myself."

And drawing from its silver envelope a cake of greenish colored soap, he put it into a gilt basin, poured water upon it, and bending one knee to the ground, he presented the whole to Madame de Sauve.

"Why, really, Master Rene," cried Henry, "your gallantry quite astonishes me; you put our court beaux quite out of the field!"

"Oh, what a delicious odor!" exclaimed

Charlotte, rubbing her fair hands with the pearly froth that arose from the balmy soap.

Rene, unmoved by Henry's raillery, continued to fulfill his self-imposed duties with the most rigorous exactitude: putting aside the basin he had held, he presented Charlotte with a towel of the most delicate texture, and when she had thoroughly dried her hands, said:

"And now, my lord, you are at liberty to follow your royal inclination."

Charlotte held out her hand to Henry, who kissed it and returned to his seat, more convinced than ever that something most extraordinary was going on in the mind of the Florentine.

"Well?" said Charlotte.

The Florentine appeared as though trying to collect all his resolution, and after a short hesitation, turned toward Henry.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SIRE, YOU WILL BE KING."

"SIRE!" said Rene to Henry, "I wish to speak to you on a matter which has for a long time occupied my attention."

"Of perfumes?" asked Henry, with a smile.

"Well, yes, sire—of perfumes," replied Rene, with a singular tone of acquiescence.

"Well, then, speak on; for it is a subject that has much interested me."

Rene looked at the king, endeavoring to read his thoughts, but they were impenetrable; and seeing that his scrutiny was unavailing, he continued:

"One of my friends, sire, has just arrived from Florence: this friend has devoted much of his time to astrology."

"Yes," said Henry, "I know it is a Florentine pursuit."

"And he has, in association with the leading savans of the world, drawn the horoscopes of the principal personages in Europe!"

"Indeed!" said Henry.

"And as the house of Bourbon is among the leading houses, descending, as it does, from the Comte du Clermont, fifth son of Saint Louis, your majesty may well suppose that yours has not been forgotten."

Henry listened still more attentively; adding, with a smile as indifferent as he could make it: "And do you recollect this horoscope?"

"Oh!" answered Rene, shaking his head; "your horoscope is one not easily forgotten."

"Really!" said Henry, with an ironical look.

"Yes, sire; your majesty, according to the indications of this horoscope, is called to the most brilliant destiny."

The eyes of the young prince emitted involuntarily a lightning glance, and then as rapidly reassumed its look of indifference.

"All these Italian oracles are flatterers," said Henry, "and he who flatters, lies. Are there not some who say I shall command armies?"

And he burst into loud laughter. But an observer less occupied than Rene would have marked and comprehended the effort this laugh had cost.

"Sire," said Rene, coolly, "the horoscope announces better than that."

"Does it announce, that at the head of one of these armies I shall gain battles?"

"Better than that, sire."

"Well, then," said Henry, "at all events I shall be a conqueror."

"Sire, you will be king!"

"Eh, *ventre-saint-gris!*" said Henry, repressing a violent palpitation of the heart; "am I not so already?"

"Sire, my friend knows what he promises; not only will you be king, but you will reign."

"And then," said Henry, in the same strain of raillery, "your friend requires ten golden crowns, does he not, Rene? for such a prophecy, in such times, is indeed an ambitious one. Well, well, Rene, I am not rich, so I will give your friend five at once, and the other five when the prophecy shall be realized."

"Sire," said Rene, "allow me to proceed."

"What, is not that all?" said Henry. "Well, if I am an emperor, I will give double."

"Sire, my friend came from Florence with his horoscope, which he has renewed

in Paris, and which gives again the same result; and he has confided the secret to me."

"A secret that concerns his majesty?" inquired Charlotte, eagerly.

"I believe so," replied the Florentine.

"Then say it," answered the Baroness de Sauve. "What is it?"

"It is," said the Florentine, weighing each of his words well; "it is in reference to the reports of poisoning which have been circulated for some time at court."

A slight expansion of the nostrils was the only indication which the king of Navarre exhibited of his increased attention at the sudden change in the conversation.

"And does your friend, the Florentine," inquired the king, "know anything of these poisonings?"

"Yes, sire."

"How can you confide to me a secret which is not your own, Rene; and particularly when the secret is so important?" inquired Henry, in the most natural tone he could assume.

"My friend has some advice to ask of your majesty."——"Of me?"

"What is there astonishing in this, sire? When my friend confided his secret to me, your majesty was the first chief of the Calvinistic party, and M. de Conde the second."

"Well!" observed Henry.

"This friend hoped you would use your all-powerful influence with the Prince de Conde to entreat him not to be hostile toward him."

"Explain yourself, Rene, if you would have me comprehend you," replied Henry, without manifesting the least alteration in his features or voice.

"Sire, your majesty will comprehend at the first word; this friend knows all the particulars of the attempt to poison Monseigneur the Prince de Conde."

"What! did they attempt to poison the Prince de Conde?" exclaimed Henry, with well-acted surprise. "Indeed! and when was that?"

Rene looked steadfastly at the king, and replied in these words only:

"Eight days since, your majesty."

"Some enemy?" inquired the king.

"Yes," replied Rene; "an enemy whom your majesty knows, and who knows your majesty."

"Yes, now I remember," said Henry; "I must have heard talk of this, but I forget the details, which your friend would disclose to me, you say."

"Well, a scented apple was offered to the Prince de Conde, but fortunately his physician was there when it was brought to him: he took it from the messenger, and smelled it. Two days afterward a gangrenous humor formed in his face; then an extravasation of blood, and then a cancerous sore which ate into his cheeks, were the price of his devotion or the result of his imprudence."

"Unfortunately, being already half a Catholic," answered Henry, "I have lost all my influence over M. de Conde, and therefore your friend would gain nothing by addressing me."

"It was not only with M. de Conde that your majesty might, by your influence, be useful to my friend, but with the Prince de Porcian, brother of him who was poisoned."

"What!" observed the king, "do you also know the details of the poisoning of the Prince de Porcian?"

"Yes," was the reply. "They knew that he burned every night a lamp near his bed; they poisoned the oil, and he was stifled with the odor."

Henry clenched his moistened palms together with rage.

"Thus then," he replied, "he whom you term your friend, knows not only the details of this poisoning, but the author of it also?"

"Yes; and that is why he wished to ascertain from you if you had sufficient influence with the Prince de Porcian to induce him to pardon the murderer of his brother?"

"Unfortunately," replied Henry, "being still half Huguenot I have no influence over the Prince de Porcian; he was wrong, therefore, to address me."

"But what do you think of the inclinations of the Prince de Conde and M. de Porcian?"

"How can I tell their inclinations,

Rene? God has not, that I know, given me the privilege of reading hearts."

"Your majesty may ask yourself the question," said the Florentine, calmly; "has there not been in your majesty's life some event so gloomy, that it may serve as an example of clemency — so painful, that it may be a touchstone for generosity?"

These words were pronounced in a tone that made Charlotte shudder. The allusion was so direct, so manifest, that the young lady turned aside to hide her flushed face, and avoid Henry's look.

Henry made a powerful effort over himself, smoothed his brow, which, during the Florentine's address had been heavy with menace, and changing the deep filial grief which weighed upon his heart into an air of vague reflection, said:

"In my life—a gloomy event!—no, Rene—no; I only recollect the folly and recklessness of my youth mixed with those fatalities, more or less cruel, which are inflicted on all the frailties of nature, and the trials of God."

Rene mastered himself, in his turn, and turned his glance from Henry to Charlotte, as if to excite the one and restrain the other—for Charlotte, going toward her toilet to conceal the feelings inspired by this conversation, again extended her hand toward the box of salve.

"But if, sire, you were the brother of the Prince de Porcian, or the brother of the Prince de Conde, and your brother had been poisoned, or your father assassinated?"

Charlotte uttered a cry, and again was about to apply the salve to her lips. Rene saw this, but neither stopped her by word nor gesture; he only said, hastily:

"In the name of Heaven, sire, reply! Sire, if you were in their place, what would you do?"

Henry collected himself; wiped, with tremulous hand, his forehead bedewed with drops of cold perspiration, and elevating his figure to its full height, replied in the midst of the breathless silence of Rene and Charlotte:

"If I were in their place, and were sure of being king—that is to say, of representing God on earth—I would do like God, and forgive!"

"Madame!" exclaimed Rene, snatching the salve from Madame de Sauve's hands; "madame, give me that box! I see my assistant made a mistake in bringing it to you; to-morrow I will send you another."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEW CONVERT.

ON the following day there was to be a hunt in the forest of St. Germain. Henry had desired that there should be kept ready, at eight o'clock in the morning, saddled and bridled, a small horse of the Béarn beeed, which he intended as a present for Madame de Sauve, but which he first intended to try himself. The horse was duly brought; and as the clock struck eight, Henry descended.

The horse, full of breed and fire, in spite of its small size, was plunging about in the courtyard. It was cold, and a slight hoar frost covered the ground.

Henry was about to cross the courtyard, in order to reach the stables, where the horse and his groom were waiting, when passing before a Swiss soldier, who was on guard at the door, the sentinel presented arms to him, saying:

"God preserve his majesty the king of Navarre!"

At this wish, and particularly the accent and emphasis of the voice that uttered it, the Béarnais started, and retreated a step, muttering the words, "De Mouy!"

"Yes, sire, De Mouy."

"And what are you doing here?"

"Seeking you."

"What would you?"

"I must speak to your majesty!"

"Rash man!" said the king, going close to him, "do you know that you risk your head?"

"I know it, and I am here."

Henry turned slightly pale, looked around him, and retreated a second time no less quickly than before.

He saw the Duc d'Alencon at a window.

Then, changing his air, Henry took the musket from De Mouy, and appeared to be examining it.

"De Mouy," he said, "it is some very powerful motive that makes you come thus to throw yourself into the wolf's throat."

"It is, sire, aud for eight days I have been on the watch. It was only yesterday I learned that your majesty meant to try this horse this morning, and I took my post, accordingly, at this door of the Louvre."

"Why under this costume?"

"The captain of the company is a Protestant, and one of my friends."

"Take your musket, and continue your guard. We are watched. As I return, I will endeavor to say a word to you; but if I do not speak to you, do not stop me. Adieu!"

De Mouy resumed his measured tread, and Henry advanced toward the horse.

"What is that pretty creature?" inquired the Duc d'Alencon, from his window.

"A horse I am going to try this morning."

"But it is not a man's horse."

"It is intended for a pretty woman."

"Be careful, Henry, or you will be indiscreet; for we shall see this pretty woman at the chase, and if I do not know whose chevalier you are, I shall at least learn whose esquire you may be."

"Eh, mon Dieu! you will not know," said Henry, with his wonted laugh, "for this pretty woman being very unwell this morning, she cannot ride to-day." And he sprung into the saddle.

"Ah, bah!" said D'Alencon, laughing; "poor Madame de Sauve!"

"Francois! Francois—'tis you who are indiscreet."

"And what ails the lovely Charlotte?" inquired the duke.

"Why," answered Henry, "I hardly know. A kind of heaviness in the head, as Dariole informed me—a weakness in all her limbs, a perfect languor."

"And will that prevent you from accompaning us?" inquired D'Alencon.

"Why should it?" was Henry's reply. "You know how madly I love a hunt, and that nothing would make me miss one."

"You will miss this, however, Henry," replied the duke, as he turned round, and after having spoken an instant with some one whom Henry could not see, "for I learn from his majesty that the chase cannot take place."

"Bah!" said Henry, with the most disappointed air in the world; "and why not?"

"Very important letters have arrived from M. de Nevers, and there is a council being held by the king, the queen-mother, and my brother the Duke d'Anjou."

"Ah, ah!" said Henry to himself, "is there any news from Poland?" Then he added, aloud: "In this case it is useless for me to run any more risk on this slippery ground. Au revoir! brother." And pulling his horse up short by De Mouy, "My friend," he said, "call one of your comrades to finish your guard. Help the groom to take the saddle off my horse, put it on your head, and carry it to the goldsmith of the royal stable; there is some embroidery to do to it, which he had not time to finish. You can bring me back his answer."

De Mouy hastily obeyed, for the Duke d'Alencon had disappeared from his window, and it was evident he had conceived some suspicion. Scarcely, indeed, had the Huguenot chief left the wicket than the duke appeared. A real Swiss had taken De Mouy's place.

D'Alencon looked attentively at the fresh sentinel, then, turning to Henry:

"This is not the man with whom you were conversing just now, is it, brother?"

"The other was a young fellow of my house, for whom I obtained a post among the Swiss. I gave him a commission which he has gone to execute."

"Ah!" said the duke, as if satisfied with the answer; "and how is Marguerite?"

"I am just going to inquire, brother."

"Haven't you seen her since yesterday?"

"No. I went last night at eleven o'clock; but Gillonne told me she was much fatigued and asleep."

"You will not find her in her apartment. She has gone out."

"Yes," replied Henry, "most likely. She was going to the Convent of the Annonciade."

There was no means of pushing the conversation further, as Henry appeared determined only to reply.

The two brothers-in-law then separated —the Duke d'Alencon to go and hear the news, as he said, and the king of Navarre to return to his apartment.

At the moment the two brothers-in-law separated, some one knocked at the door of Henry's sleeping apartment. He opened the door, gave admittance to De Mouy, and closed the door after him.

"Sire," said De Mouy, "the time for action has arrived. Fear nothing, sire—we are alone; and I will be quick, for time is very precious. Your majesty may now, by a single word, restore to us all that we have lost for our holy religion during this disastrous year. Let us be explicit, let us be brief, let us be frank."

"I listen, my gallant De Mouy," replied the king, seeing that it was impossible any longer to avoid an explanation.

"Is it true that your majesty has abjured the Protestant religion?"

"It is true," said Henry.

"Yes; but is it an abjuration of the lips or of the heart?"

"We are always grateful to God when he has saved our life," replied Henry, not replying directly to the question; "and God has visibly spared me in a most cruel strait and danger."

"But, sire," continued De Mouy, "confess that your abjuration is not a matter of conviction but of calculation. You have abjured that the king may let you live, and not because God has spared your life."

"Whatever may be the cause of my conversion, De Mouy," answered Henry, "I am not the less a Catholic."

"Yes; but shall you always continue one? Should an occasion present itself, would you not relapse? Well, this occasion presents itself at this moment: Rochelle is insurgent; Roussillon and Béarn only await the signal to act, and in Guienne all is ripe for revolt. Only avow that you were a Catholic on compulsion, and I will answer for all the rest."

"My dear De Mouy, a gentleman of my birth is never forced; what I have done, I have done freely."

"But, sire," continued the young man, his heart oppressed at this unexpected resistance; "you do not reflect that in thus abandoning us, you betray us."

Henry remained perfectly unmoved.

"Yes," De Mouy continued; "you betray us, sire; for very many of us have come, at the peril of our lives, to save your honor and liberty. We have prepared everything to give you a throne, sire; not only liberty, but power; a throne for your acceptance; for, in two months, you may choose between France and Navarre."

"De Mouy," replied Henry, looking downward for an instant to conceal the joy that sparkled in his eyes; "De Mouy, I am safe; I am a Catholic; I am the husband of Marguerite; I am the brother of King Charles; I am son-in-law of my good mother Catherine; and when, De Mouy, I took all these relations upon me, I not only calculated the chances, but also the obligations."

"But, sire," replied De Mouy, "what am I to believe? They say that your marriage is incomplete; they say you are free in your own heart; they say that Catherine's hatred—"

"Lies, lies, lies all!" interrupted the Béarnais, hastily; "you have been impudently deceived, my friend. My dearest Marguerite is indeed my wife; Catherine is truly my mother; the king Charles IX. is really the lord and master of my life and of my heart."

De Mouy started, and a smile almost contemptuous passed over his lips.

"Then, sire," said he, endeavoring by his look to fathom a mind so full of concealment; "this is the answer I shall bear to my brothers in arms. I shall say that the king of Navarre extends his hand and gives his heart to those who cut our throats; I shall say that he has become the flatterer of the queen-mother, and the friend of Maurevel."

"My dear De Mouy," was Henry's response, "the king is just breaking up the council; and I must go and learn what are the important reasons which have post-

poned the hunt. Adieu! imitate me, my friend: renounce politics, swear allegiance to the king, and take the mass." And Henry led, or rather pushed the young man to the door of his antechamber, while De Mouy's amazement was fast giving way to rage.

Scarcely was the door closed, than, unable to resist his desire of visiting his vengeance on something for want of somebody, De Mouy squeezed his hat between his hands, threw it on the ground, and trampling it under foot, as a bull does the cloak of a matador:

"S'death!" he cried; "he is a cowardly prince, and I have a great mind to kill myself on this very spot, that my blood may forever stain him and his name."

"Hush! M. de Mouy," said a voice which came from behind a half-opened door; "hush! or some one else will hear you besides myself."

De Mouy turned round suddenly, and perceived the Duke d'Alencon enveloped in his mantle, and thrusting his pale face into the corridor to ascertain if he and De Mouy were really alone.

"The Duke d'Alencon!" cried De Mouy; "then I am lost!"

"On the contrary," said the prince, in a subdued tone, "you have perchance found that which you have been seeking; and, in proof of this, I would not have you kill yourself here, as you propose. Believe me, your blood may be better employed than in reddening the threshhold of the king of Navarre."

And, at these words, the duke opened wide the door of the chamber which had been hitherto ajar.

"This chamber belongs to two of my gentlemen," said the duke; "and no one will come to seek you here. So we may converse at our ease. Come hither, then, sir."

"I am at your royal highness' service," said the amazed conspirator, and he entered the chamber, the duke closing the door after him quickly and securely.

De Mouy entered, furious, enraged and desperate; but gradually the cold and steady gaze of the young Duke Francois had the effect on the young Huguenot captain that ice has upon intoxication.

"M. de Mouy," said Francois, "I thought I recognized you in spite of your disguise, as you presented arms to my brother Henry. What, De Mouy, are not you satisfied with the king of Navarre?"

"Monseigneur!"

"Come, come! speak frankly to me; and perhaps you may find I am your friend."——"You, monseigneur!"

"Yes, I; but speak."

"I know not what to say to your highness; what I had to tell the king of Navarre touched on interests impossible to be understood by you; besides," added De Mouy, "it was about trifles after all."

"Trifles!" exclaimed the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Trifles! when for this you have exposed your life by returning to the Louvre, when you well know your head is worth its weight in gold? For it is well known that you, like the king of Navarre and the Prince de Conde, are one of the principal leaders of the Huguenots."

"If you think so, monseigneur, act toward me as the brother of Charles the king, and the son of Catherine the queen-mother, should act."

"Why would you have me act so, when I tell you I am your friend? Tell me but the truth, and—"

"Monseigneur, I swear to you—"

"Do not swear, sir; the Reformed religion forbids oaths, and especially false oaths." De Mouy frowned.

"I tell you I know all," continued the duke. De Mouy was still silent.

"Do you doubt it?" proceeded the prince, with earnestness. "Well, then, my dear De Mouy, I must convince you, and you will see if I speak sooth or not. Have you, or not, proposed to my brother-in-law, Henry, there, just now," and the duke extended his hand toward Henry's apartments; "your aid, and that of your allies, to re-establish him in his kingdom of Navarre?" De Mouy looked at the duke in amazement.

"Propositions which he refused in alarm—" De Mouy remained stupefied with surprise.

"Did you not, then, invoke your ancient friendship — the remembrance of your common religion? Did you not, then, seek to lure on the king of Navarre by a very brilliant hope and prospect—so brilliant that he was dazzled at it—the hope of attaining even the crown of France? Eh! am I, or not, well informed? Was it not this you came to propose to the Béarnais?"

"Monseigneur," exclaimed De Mouy, "it is so precisely all that occurred, that I ask myself, at this moment, whether I ought not to say to your highness that you lie! provoke you in this very chamber to a combat, and seek in the death of one of us the extinction of this terrible secret."

"Gently, my brave De Mouy, gently," replied D'Alencon without changing countenance, or making the slightest motion at this menace; "this secret will be better kept between us two if we both live, than if one of us were to die. Listen to me, and do not thus grip the handle of your sword; for the third time I tell you, you are with a friend; reply, then, as to a friend. Tell me, did not the king of Navarre refuse your offers?"

"He did, my lord, and I confess it, because the avowal can compromise no one but myself."

"And are you still of the same opinion you were when you quitted my brother Henry's chamber, and said he was a cowardly prince, and unworthy any longer to remain your leader?"

"I am, monseigneur, and more so than ever."

"Well, then, M. de Mouy, am I, the third son of Henry II.—I, a son of France—am I good enough to command your soldiers? Let us see. Do you think me so loyal that you rely on my word?"

"You, monseigneur! you the chief of the Huguenots?"

"Why not? This is the epoch of conversions, as you know, and if Henry has become a Catholic, why may not I turn Protestant?"

"Unquestionably, monseigneur; but perhaps you will explain to me—"

"Nothing more simple: I will unfold to you, in two words, everybody's politics. My brother Charles kills the Huguenots, that he may reign more absolutely. My brother D'Anjou lets him kill them, that he may succeed my brother Charles, and, as you know, my brother Charles is often ill. But I—it is very different with me, who will never reign over France; at least, I have two elder brothers before me; with me, whom the hatred of my mother and brothers, more even than the law of nature, alienates from the throne—with me, who see before me no family affection, no glory, no kingdom—with me, who yet have a heart as noble as my brothers; and therefore I, De Mouy, would fain cut myself out a throne with my sword in this France which they are staining with gore! And this is what I would do, De Mouy—listen: I would be king of Navarre, not by right of birth, but by election; and observe well, you can have no objection to make me so, for I am no usurper; my brother refuses your offers, and, buried in torpor, declares openly that this kingdom of Navarre is but a fiction. With Henry of Béarn, you have nothing now in common; with me you may have a sword and a name. Francois d'Alencon, son of France, can protect all his companions or accomplices, as you may please to call them.—Well, then! what say you to this offer, M. de Mouy?"

"I say it perfectly bewilders me, monseigneur."

"De Mouy, De Mouy, we shall have many obstacles to overcome; do not, then, show yourself so scrupulous and difficult with the son of a king, and the brother of a king, who comes to you."

"Monseigneur, the thing should be done at once, if I were the only person to decide; but we have a council, and how brilliant soever may be the offer, perhaps the leaders will not accede to it without a condition."

"This is another consideration, and the reply is that of an honest heart and a prudent mind. By the way in which I have acted, De Mouy, you must see that I am frank and honorable: treat me, then, on your part, like a man you esteem, and

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not a prince whom you would flatter. De Mouy, have I any chance?"

"On my word, monseigneur, and since your highness desires to have my opinion, you shall have every chance, since the king of Navarre refuses the offer I have just made him. But I repeat to you, monseigneur, it is indispensable that I have a consultation with our leaders."

"Of course, sir," was D'Alencon's reply; "only when shall I have the answer?"

De Mouy considered the prince with silent attention, and then coming to a resolution, said: "Monseigneur, give me your hand; it is necessary that the hand of a son of France should touch mine, to be sure I shall not be betrayed."

The duke not only extended his hand to De Mouy, but seized his, and clasped it in his own.

"Now, monseigneur, I am assured," said the young Huguenot; "if we were betrayed, I should acquit you of all participation; without which, monseigneur, however little you were concerned in such treachery, you would be dishonored."

"Why do you say that, De Mouy, before you have brought me even the reply of your chiefs?"

"Because, monseigneur, when you desire to know when the answer shall be given, you ask me in that question where our leaders are; and if I replied, 'This evening,' you would know that the chiefs were concealed in Paris."

And as he said these words, with a gesture of distrust, De Mouy fixed his piercing eye on the face of the false and vacillating young prince.

"What, you have still your doubts, De Mouy; but yet what right have I to your confidence at a first interview? You will know me better by-and-by. You say this evening, then, M. de Mouy?"

"Yes, monseigneur, for time presses. This evening. But where?"

"Here, in the Louvre; in this apartment, if that suits you."

"This apartment is occupied."

"By two of my gentlemen."

"Monseigneur, it seems to me imprudent to return to the Louvre."

"Wherefore?"

"Because others may recognize me as well as your highness. Yet, if you will accord me a safe conduct, I will return to the Louvre."

"De Mouy," replied the duke, "my safe conduct, seized on your person, would destroy me, and would not save you: I cannot. The least evidence of concert between us, before my mother or brothers, would cost me my life. Make, therefore, another trial of your own courage. I will guarantee your safety, and try on my word what you tried without my brother's word. Come to the Louvre this evening."

"But how?"

"I think I see the means before me —here."

And the duke saw on the bed La Mole's dress spread out—a magnificent cherry-colored cloak, embroidered with gold, a hat with a white plume, surrounded by a string of pearls, with gold and silver between them, and a gray satin doublet worked with gold.

"Do you see this cloak, feather, and doublet?" said the duke. "They belong to M. de la Mole, one of my gentlemen, and a fop of the first water. This dress creates quite a sensation at court, and M. de la Mole is recognized a hundred yards off when he wears it. I will give you his tailor's address, and, by paying him double the value, he will bring you a similar suit this evening. Remember the name—M. de la Mole."

The duke had scarcely done speaking, when a step was heard of some one approaching, and a key was turned in the lock of the door.

"Who's there?" inquired the duke, hastening toward the door, which he secured with the bolt.

"Pardieu!" replied a voice from without, "that is a very odd question; who are you? It is rather pleasant, i'faith, to come to one's own room and be asked, Who's there?"

"Oh! 'tis you, M. de la Mole?"

"Of course it is. But who are you?"

D'Alencon turned round suddenly, and said to De Mouy, "Do you know M. de la Mole?"

"No, monseigneur."

"Does he know you?"

"I should say, no."

"Then all will go well. Just appear to be looking out of window."

De Mouy obeyed, and the duke opening the door, La Mole entered hastily, but when he saw the duke he retreated, surprised, and saying:

"Monseigneur the duke! Your pardon—your pardon, monseigneur!"

"It needs not, sir; I wished to see a person, and made use of your apartment."

"Pray do, monseigneur. But allow me to take my cloak and hat, for I lost both last night on the Quai de la Greve."

"Really! You must have had an encounter with some determined robbers, then?"

The duke handed the young gentleman the desired articles, and La Mole retired to dress himself in the antechamber. On his return in a few moments:

"Has your highness heard or seen anything of the Comte de Coconnas?" he asked.

"No, M. le Comte; and yet he should have been on duty this morning."

"Then they have murdered him!" said La Mole to himself, as he made his obeisance and rushed out again.

The duke listened to his retreating footsteps, and then opening the door, said to De Mouy: "Look at him, and try to imitate his easy and peculiar gesture."

"I will do my best," replied De Mouy; "unfortunately, I am not a fine gentleman, but only a soldier."

"I shall expect you before midnight, here, or in some unoccupied apartment. To-night, before midnight."

"To-night, before midnight!"

"Ah! apropos—De Mouy, swing your right arm as you walk; it is a peculiarity of M. de la Mole."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RUE TIZON AND THE RUE CLOCHE-PERCÉE.

La Mole ran out of the Louvre, and went in search of poor Coconnas.

First he went to the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, to Maitre la Huriere; but he found nothing there but breakfast, to which, dispite his inquietude, he did ample justice.

His appetite appeased, La Mole went along the Seine. Arrived at the Quai de la Greve, he recognized the spot where he had been stopped three or four hours before, and found on the field of battle a fragment of his hat plume. La Mole had ten feathers, each handsomer than the other; he stopped, nevertheless, to pick up this, or rather the only fragment that remained of it, and was looking at it with a piteous air, when an authoritative voice bade him stand aside. La Mole looked up, and perceived a litter, preceded by two pages, and followed by a squire. La Mole thought he recognized the litter, and stood on one side.

He was not mistaken.

"M. de la Mole?" said a sweet voice from the litter, while a hand, white and soft as satin, put aside the curtains.

"Yes, 'tis I myself, madame," replied La Mole, bowing.

"M. de la Mole, with a plume in his hand?" said the lady. "Are you in love, then, and seek here lost traces of your mistress?"

"Yes, madame," returned La Mole, "I am in love, and to desperation. As for these relics, they are my own, though not those I seek. But permit me to inquire after your majesty's health."

"Excellent — never better; probably from the circumstance of my having passed the night in a convent."

"Ah, in a convent!" said La Mole, looking at Marguerite with a singular expression.

"Yes; what is there so astonishing in that?"

"May I venture to inquire, in what convent?"

"Certainly; I make no mystery of it: at the convent of the Annunciation. But what are you doing here, with so wild an air?"

"Madame, I am looking for a friend: and in his place I find this plume."

"Which belongs to him? You really alarm me for him; the spot has an ill name."

"Your majesty may be reassured; the plume is mine: I lost it here this morning, at about half-past five, in escaping from four bandits who attacked me."

Marguerite suppressed an exclamation of terror. "Oh, tell me all about it!"

"A simple matter, madame. It was, as I said, about half-past five—"

"And at half-past five you were already out?"

"Nay, madame, I had not yet gone home."

"Ah!" said Marguerite, with a smile that to every one else would have seemed malicious, but which La Mole thought adorable; "returning home so late! You are rightly served."

"I do not complain, your majesty," said La Mole; "and had I been killed, I should have thought myself far happier than I merit. But as I was returning, four scoundrels rushed on me, armed with long knives, and I was fain to fly, for I had left my sword in the house where I had passed the night."

"Oh, I understand," said Marguerite, with an exquisite air of simplicity; "you are going to fetch your sword."

La Mole looked at Marguerite, doubtingly:

"Madame," said he, "I should be glad to return thither, for my sword is an excellent blade; but I do not know where the house is."

"What!" said Marguerite, "you do not know where the house is?"

"No; Satan exterminate me, if I have the least idea."

"How very strange! Quite a romance, upon my word."

"Quite so, madame."

"Relate it to me."

"It is somewhat long."

"No matter, I have plenty of time."

"And very incredible."

"Go on, I am excessively credulous."

"Your majesty commands me?"

"Yes, if necessary."

"I obey: last night we supped at Maitre la Huriere's."

"First and foremost," asked Marguerite, with a beautiful simplicity, "who is Maitre la Huriere?"

"Maitre la Huriere, madame," answered La Mole, with another look of doubt at the queen, "is the landlord of the Belle Etoile, in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"Ah, I understand; well, you were supping at La Huriere's, with your friend Coconnas, no doubt?"

"Yes, madame, with my friend Coconnas; when a man entered, and gave each of us a billet."

"Alike?"

"Exactly."

"And which contained—"

"But one line:

"'*You are waited for in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue de Jouy.*'"

"And no signature?"

"None, but three words, three delicious words, that promised a triple happiness."

"And what were these three words?"

"EROS, CUPIDO, AMOR."

"Three soft, pretty names, by my faith; and did they fulfill what they promised?"

"Oh, yes, madame," cried La Mole, with enthusiasm, "a hundred-fold!"

"Continue. I am anxious to know what awaited you at the Rue Saint Antoine."

"Two duennas who stipulated that our eyes should be bandaged. Your majesty may imagine we made no great difficulty. My guide led me to the right, my friend's led him to the left."

"And then?" asked Marguerite.

"I do not know where they took my friend; perhaps to the infernal regions," said La Mole; "but I was taken to Paradise."

"And whence your too great inquisitiveness no doubt got you expelled."

"Exactly so: your majesty has the gift of divination. I waited until day should come to show me where I was, when the duenna entered, blindfolded me again, and led me away, out of the house, and some hundred paces on, and then made me promise not to take off the bandage till I had counted fifty. I counted fifty, and then, on taking off the handkerchief, found myself in the Rue St. Antoine, op-

posite the Rue de Jouy. On returning here, just now, I perceived a fragment of my plume, which I shall preserve as a precious relic of this glorious night. But amid my happiness, one thing disquiets me: what can have become of my friend?"

"He is not at the Louvre, then?"

"Alas, no; and I have sought him at the Belle Etoile, at the tennis court, and everywhere, but there is no Annibal to be found."

As he said this, and accompanied his lamentation by throwing up his arms, La Mole disclosed his doublet, which was torn and cut in several places.

"Why, you have been completely riddled!" said Marguerite.

"Riddled—that is the exact word," said La Mole, not sorry to make the most of the danger he had incurred.

"Why did you not change your doublet at the Louvre, when you got back?"

"Why," said La Mole, "because there was some one in my chamber."

"How, some one in your chamber?" said Marguerite, whose eyes expressed the greatest astonishment. "Who?"

"His highness—"

"Hush!" said Marguerite.

The young man obeyed.

"Qui ad lecticam meam stant?"—("Who are with the litter?")

"Duo pueri et unus eques."—("Two pages and a groom.")

"Optimè barbari," said she. "Dic, Moles, quem inveneris in cubiculo tuo?"—("Good; they won't understand us. Tell me, La Mole, whom did you find in your chamber?")

"Franciscum ducem."—("Duke Francis.")

"Agentem."—("What was he doing?")

"Nescio quid."—("I don't know.")

"Quo cum?"—("Who was with him?")

"Cum ignoto."—("A man I don't know.")

"Singular," said Marguerite. "So you have not found Coconnas?"

"No, madame, and I am dying with anxiety."

"Well," said Marguerite, "I will not further delay your search; but I have an idea he will be found before long. But nevertheless, go and look for him."

And the queen placed her finger on her lip. Now, as Marguerite had not communicated any secret to La Mole, he comprehended that this charming sign must have another meaning.

The cortege pursued its way; and La Mole proceeded along the quay till he came to the Rue du Long-Pont, which took him into the Rue Saint Antoine.

He stopped opposite the Rue de Jouy.

It was there, the previous evening, that the duennas[1] had blindfolded Coconnas and himself; he well remembered he had turned to the right and counted twenty paces; he did so again, and found himself opposite a house, or rather a wall, with a house in it: in the middle of the wall was a door studded with large nails.

The house was in the Rue Cloche-Percée, a little narrow street that commences in the Rue St. Antoine, and ends in the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile.

"Sangbleu!" said La Mole. "This is it: as I left the house, I touched the nails, and as I descended the second step, that man who was killed in the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, passed, crying for help."

La Mole knocked at the door. A porter with a vast mustache opened it.

"Was es dass?" said he.—("What's that?")

"Ah," said La Mole to himself, "we are German, it seems. My friend," continued he, "I want my sword, which I left here last night."

"Ich verstehe nicht," said the porter.—("I don't understand you.")

"My sword—"

"Ich verstehe nicht."

"—that I left—"

"Ich verstehe nicht."

"—In this house, where I passed the night—"

"Gehe zum Teufel."—("Go to the devil!")

And he shut the door in his face.

"Mordieu!" said La Mole, "had I my sword, I would pass it through your body."

La Mole then struck into the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, turned to the right, counted fifty paces, turned to the right again, and found himself in the Rue Tizon, a little street parallel with the Rue Cloche-Percée, and exactly like it. Scarcely had he taken thirty steps when he found the little door studded with nails, the narrow loopholes, the two steps and the wall.

La Mole then reflected that he might have mistaken his right for his left, and he knocked at this door, but spite of his reiterated attempts, no one came. He walked round the same way several times, and then arrived at the natural conclusion that the house had two entrances, one in the Rue Tizon, the other Rue Cloche-Percée. But this logical reasoning did not give him back his sword, or his friend.

He had for an instant an idea of purchasing another rapier, and pinking the porter; but he was checked by the reflection, that if he belonged to Marguerite, she, doubtless, had her reasons for selecting him, and would be vexed were she deprived of him.

Now La Mole would not for the world have done anything to vex Marguerite.

To avoid the temptation, he returned to the Louvre.

This time his apartment was empty; and being in no small haste to change his pourpoint, which was somewhat dilapidated, he hastened to the bed to take down his fine gray satin doublet, when, to his intense amazement, he saw hanging beside it the identical sword he had left in the Rue Cloche-Percée. He took it and examined it: it was indeed the same.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "there is some magic in this." Then, with a sigh: "Ah, if Coconnas would come back like this sword!"

Two or three hours afterward the door in the Rue Tizon opened. It was five o'clock, and consequently dark.

A female enveloped in a long furred mantle, accompanied by a servant, came out of the door, glided rapidly into the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, knocked at a little door of the Hotel D'Argenson, entered the hotel, left it again by the great gate that opens into the Vieille Rue du Temple, reached a private door of the Hotel de Guise, opened it with a pass-key, and disappeared.

Half an hour afterward, a young man, his eyes bandaged, came out of the same door of the same house, led by an old woman, who took him to the corner of the Rue Geoffroy-Lasnier and De la Mortellerie. There she bade him count fifty paces, and then take off the handkerchief.

The young man complied scrupulously with these directions, and at the prescribed number took off the bandage.

"Mordi!" cried he, "I'll be hanged if I know where I am! Six o'clock! Why, where can La Mole be? I'll run to the Louvre; I shall perhaps hear of him there."

So saying, Coconnas started off, and arrived at the Louvre in less time than a horse would have performed the distance.

He questioned the Swiss and the sentinel. The Swiss thought he had seen M. de la Mole go out, but he had not seen him return. The sentinel had only been on guard an hour and a half, and had seen nothing.

Coconnas ascended the stairs, entered La Mole's room, and found nothing but his torn doublet, which redoubled his anxiety.

He then betook himself to La Huriere's. La Huriere had seen M. la Mole—M. de la Mole had breakfasted there.

Reassured by these tidings, Coconnas ordered supper, which occupied him until eight o'clock, when, recruited by a good meal and two bottles of wine, he again started in search of his friend.

For an hour Coconnas traversed the streets near the Quai de la Reve, the Rue Saint Antoine, and the Rues Tizon and Cloche-Percée.

At last he returned to the Louvre, determined to watch under the gate there until La Mole's return.

He was not a hundred paces from the Louvre, and was assisting a female to rise, whose husband he had upset just before, when, by the light of a large lamp, he perceived the cherry-velvet mantle and white plume of his friend, which,

like a ghost, disappeared beneath the portal of the Louvre.

The cherry-colored mantle was too well known to be for an instant mistaken.

"Mordi!" cried Coconnas; "it is he at last! Eh, La Mole! Why does he not answer? Fortunately my legs are as good as my voice."

He dashed after Cherry Mantle, but only in time to see him, as he entered the court, disappear in the vestibule.

"La Mole!" cried Coconnas; "stop! stop! why are you in such haste?"

Cherry Mantle mounted the second story as if he had wings.

"Ah, you are angry with me. Well, I can go no further."

Coconnas ceased the pursuit, but followed with his eyes the fugitive, who now arrived at the apartments of the queen of Navarre: suddenly, a female appeared, and took Cherry Mantle by the hand.

"Oh," said Coconnas, "that's Queen Marguerite; now I know why he would not wait."

After a few whispered words, Cherry Mantle followed the queen into her apartments.

"Good!" said Coconnas. "There are times when your best friend is in the way: this is one, and I'll not interrupt the old fellow."

So Coconnas sat down on a bench covered with velvet.

"I'll stop here for him—or stay, he's with the queen, and I may stop long enough. It's confounded cold here, and I may just as well wait for him in his room; he must come there at last."

At this moment he heard a quick step on the stairs above, and a voice singing a little air so usual in La Mole's mouth that Coconnas looked up. It was La Mole himself, who, perceiving the Piedmontese, ran down the stairs four at a time, and threw himself into his arms.

"Mordi! here you are!" said Coconnas. "Which way did you come out?"

"Why, by the Rue Cloche-Percée."

"No. I don't mean there."

"Whence then?"

"From the queen."

"From the queen!"

"Ay, from the queen."

"I have not been with her."

"Come! come!"

"My dear Annibal," said La Mole, "I've this instant left my room, where I've been awaiting for you these two hours."

"You've just left your room?"

"Yes."

"It was not you I ran after from the Place du Louvre?"

"When?"

"Just now."

"No."

"It wasn't you that disappeared under the gateway ten minutes ago?"

"No."

"It wasn't you that dashed up the stairs as if the devil was after you?"

"No."

"Mordi!" replied Coconnas. "The wine of la Belle Etoile has not turned my head to that extent. I tell you I saw your mantle and white plume enter the Louvre; that I followed the one and the other to the bottom of this staircase, and then saw the said mantle and plume led by a lady into that room, which I believe is Madame Marguerite's."

"Mordieu!" exclaimed La Mole, turning very pale. "Can there be treachery already!"

"Ah, swear as much as you like," returned Coconnas, "but don't tell me I was mistaken."

La Mole hesitated an instant, and then, carried away by his jealousy, rushed to the queen's door, and knocked furiously.

"You'll get us both arrested," said Coconnas. "Mordi! do you think there are ghosts at the Louvre, La Mole?"

"I do not know," said the young man: "but I've always wanted to see one, and would fain find myself face to face with this ghost, if ghost he be."

"Very good," said Coconnas; "but don't knock so loud, or you'll alarm the lady."

Enraged as La Mole was, he yet saw the justice of this observation; and though he continued to knock, knocked less violently.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHERRY MANTLE.

COCONNAS was not deceived. The lady who had stopped the cavalier in the cherry mantle was indeed the queen of Navarre; the cavalier in the cherry mantle was, as our readers have doubtlessly guessed, no other than De Mouy.

On recognizing the queen of Navarre, the young man saw there was some mistake, but he feared to say anything lest a cry from the queen should betray him. He therefore suffered himself to be led into the apartment, resolved, once there, to say to his fair guide, "Silence for silence, madame."

Marguerite had gently pressed the arm of him whom, in the darkness, she mistook for La Mole, and whispered in his ear, in Latin:

"I am alone; come in, dearest."

De Mouy entered in silence; but scarcely was he in the antechamber, and the door closed, than Marguerite perceived that it was not La Mole, and she then uttered that very cry which the prudent Huguenot had dreaded.

"M. de Mouy!" cried she.

"Myself, madame," returned the young man; "and I entreat your majesty to suffer me to proceed, without informing any one of my presence at the Louvre."

"Oh, M. de Mouy," said the queen, "I was mistaken, then."

"Yes, so I comprehend," returned De Mouy; "your majesty mistook me for the king of Navarre. My dress is the same as his, and my height and figure, I have been told, are not unlike his."

Marguerite looked fixedly at him.

"Do you know Latin?" asked she.

"I did once, but I have forgotten it," replied the young man. Marguerite smiled.

"You may rely upon my discretion, M. de Mouy; and as I think I know the person you seek, I will, if you so please, conduct you to him."

"Madame," replied De Mouy, "I see that you are mistaken, and that you are completely ignorant who the person is I wish to see."

"What!" cried Marguerite, "is it not the king of Navarre you seek?"

"Alas, madame, it is with regret I have to beseech you to conceal my presence in the Louvre from the king your husband."

"M. de Mouy," said Marguerite, "I have always considered you one of the steadiest partisans of my husband, one of the most zealous Huguenot leaders. Am I, then, mistaken?"

"No, madame, for I was, up to this morning, all that you say."

"And why have you changed?"

"Madame," returned De Mouy. "I entreat you to excuse my replying, and to receive my adieu."

And De Mouy firmly, but respectfully, proceeded toward the door.

Marguerite stopped him.

"Yet, sir," said she, "I would fain request an explanation."

"Madame," returned De Mouy, "my duty bids me be silent; I need hardly say, that duty is an imperious one which prevents my obeying your majesty."

"Yet, sir—"

"Your majesty can ruin me, but you cannot require me to betray my new friends."

"Have your old friends no claims on you?"

"Those who have remained faithful, yes; those who not only have abandoned us, but have abandoned themselves, no."

Marguerite, greatly uneasy, was about to pursue her interrogatories, when Gillonne rushed in.

"The king of Navarre, madame!"

"Which way is he coming?"

"By the secret passage."

"Then let this gentleman out by the other door."

"Impossible, madame, some one is knocking there."

"Who is it?"——"I do not know."

"Go and see."

"Madame," said De Mouy, "permit me to observe, that I am lost if the king of Navarre sees me in the Louvre at this hour and in this costume."

Marguerite seized his hand, and leading him to the famous cabinet:

"Enter there," said she; "you are as safe as in your own house, for you are under my protection."

De Mouy sprang in, and hardly had he done so, when Henry appeared.

He entered with that cautious observation that made him, even when in the least danger, remark the most trifling circumstances. He instantly perceived the cloud on Marguerite's brow.

"You were musing, madame," said he.

"Yes, sire, I was."

"You are right, madame, thoughtfulness becomes you. I, too, was musing, and came to communicate my thoughts to you."

Marguerite inclined her head in token of welcome, and pointing to a seat, placed herself in an ebony chair beautifully carved.

There was an instant's pause: Henry first broke the silence.

"I remembered, madame," said he, "that my dreams as to the future had this in common with yours, that, though separated as husband and wife, we yet wished to unite our fortunes."

"It is true, sire."

"I also conjectured, that in all my plans for our common elevation, I should find in you not only a faithful but an active ally."

"Yes, sire, and I only ask to have an early opportunity of proving it to you."

"I am delighted to find you so well disposed; and I believe you have not for an instant doubted that I have lost sight of those plans I resolved upon the day that, thanks to your courage, my life was saved."

"Sire, I see that your indifference is merely a mask, and I have confidence not only in the predictions of astrologers, but also in your genius."

"What should you say, then, were some one to come in and thwart our plans, and threaten to destroy our hopes?"

"I would reply, that I am ready to strive with you, openly or in secret, against him, be he who he may."

"Madame," returned Henry, "you have the right of entering the Duke d'Alencon's apartments at all times. Might I request of you to go and see if he be not in conference with some one?"

"With whom?" asked Marguerite.

"With De Mouy."

"Why?" replied Marguerite.

"Because, if it be so, adieu all our plans."

"Speak lower, sire," said Marguerite, pointing to the cabinet.

"Some one there again," said Henry. "By my faith, that cabinet is so often occupied, that it renders your apartments quite uninhabitable."

Marguerite smiled.

"At all events, I hope it is M. de la Mole still?" said Henry.

"No, sire; it is M. de Mouy."

"De Mouy!" cried Henry, joyfully. "He is not, then, with the Duke d'Alencon. Oh, let me speak to him."

Marguerite ran to the cabinet, and without further ceremony presented De Mouy to the king.

"Ah, madame," said the young Huguenot, reproachfully, "you have not kept your promise. Suppose I were to revenge myself by saying—"

"You will not avenge yourself, my dear Mouy," said Henry, pressing his hand; "at least, not before you have heard me. Madame," continued he, "have the kindness to see that no one overhears us."

Scarcely were these words uttered when Gillonne entered all aghast and said something to Marguerite that made her leave the room instantly. Meanwhile, not troubling himself as to the cause of her abrupt departure, Henry lifted the tapestry, sounded the walls, and looked into every recess. As for De Mouy, somewhat alarmed by these precautions, he loosened his sword in the scabbard.

Marguerite, on leaving her bed-chamber, found herself in the presence of La Mole, who, in spite of Gillonne, was forcing his way in. Behind him stood Coconnas, ready to advance or retreat with him, as the case might be.

"Ah, is it you, M. de la Mole!" said the queen. "What is the matter with you? and what makes you look so pale?"

"Madame," said Gillonne, "M. de la Mole knocked so loud that, in spite of your majesty's orders, I was forced to admit him."

"Ha!" said the queen, angrily. "Is this true, M. de la Mole?"

"Madame, I wished to inform your majesty that a stranger, a robber, perhaps, had entered your apartments, wearing my mantle and hat."

"You are mad, sir," returned Marguerite; "for I see your mantle on your shoulders; and moreover, by my faith, I see your hat on your head, though you are speaking to a queen."

"Forgive me, madame!" cried La Mole, hastily uncovering. "Heaven knows it is not want of respect—"

"No, but want of faith," said the queen.

"Oh, madame," said La Mole, "when a man enters apartments in my dress, perchance under my name—"

"*A* man!" said Marguerite, pressing her lover's hand. "Very fine, M. de la Mole; look through that opening, and you will see *two* men."

And she gently raised the velvet curtains, and showed to De la Mole and Coconnas, who, moved with curiosity, came forward, Henry speaking to the cavalier in the cherry-colored mantle, whom both at once recognized as De Mouy.

"Now that you are satisfied," said Marguerite, "place yourself at that door, and let no one enter: if any one even approaches, let me know."

La Mole, docile as an infant, obeyed, and both he and Coconnas found themselves outside the door, before they had well recovered from their amazement.

"De Mouy!" cried Coconnas.

"Henry!" muttered La Mole.

"De Mouy, with your cloak and hat."

"Zounds!" said La Mole, "this is some plot."

"Ah, here we are in politics again!" grumbled Coconnas. "Fortunately, I do not see Madame de Nevers mixed up in the matter."

Marguerite returned to her bedroom; she had been absent scarcely a minute, but she had made good use of her time. Gillonne guarding the secret passage, and the two gentlemen outside the principal entrance, afforded full security.

"Madame," said Henry, "do you think it possible any one can overhear us?"

"Sire," returned Marguerite, "the walls are all double-paneled, and lined between with matresses."

"Ay, ay, that will do," said Henry, smiling.

Then, turning to De Mouy: "Now, then," said he, in a low tone, as, notwithstanding Marguerite's assurances, his fears were not dissipated, "what are you come here for?"

"Here!" repeated De Mouy.

"Yes, here—to this chamber?"

"He did not come for anything," said Marguerite; "it was I who brought him here."

"You knew then—?"

"I guessed."

"You see, De Mouy, people can guess."

"M. de Mouy," continued Marguerite, "was with Duke Francois this morning in the chamber of one of his gentlemen."

"You see, De Mouy," repeated Henry, "we know all."

"It is true," said De Mouy.

"I was sure," replied the king, "that D'Alencon had got hold of you."

"It is your fault, sire. Why did you refuse so obstinately what I offered."

"Ah, you refused!" said Marguerite. "My presentiments, then, were real."

"Madame," said Henry, "and you, my worthy De Mouy, you make me smile. What! a man comes to me, and talks to me of thrones and revolutions, and overthrowing states—to me, Henry, a prince tolerated only because I humble myself; a Huguenot, spared only because I pretend to be a Catholic; and thinks I am going to accept his propositions, made in a chamber without double panels, and not lined with mattresses. You are children, or mad!"

"But, sire, your majesty might have given me some sign, to raise our hopes."

"What did my brother-in-law say to you, De Mouy?" asked Henry.

"Oh, sire, that is not my secret."

"Oh, mon Dieu!" said Henry, impatient at having to deal with a man who did not understand him. "I do not ask you what proposals he made you. I only asked you if he had listened, and if he had overheard?"

"He had listened, sire, and he had overheard."

"He listened and overheard!—you admit that yourself. Poor conspirator that you are! Had I spoken a word, you had been undone; for, if I did not absolutely know he was there, I suspected as much; and if not he, some one else—D'Anjou, the king, or the queen-mother. The walls of the Louvre have good ears; and, knowing that, do you think I should speak? I wonder you offer a crown to the king of Navarre, when you give him credit for so little good sense."

"But, sire," said De Mouy, "had you made me a sign, I should not have lost all hope."

"Eh, ventre-saint-gris!" cried Henry. "If he listened, could he not see also? At this very instant I dread lest we may be overheard, when I say to you, De Mouy, repeat to me your proposals."

"Sire," said De Mouy, mournfully, "I am now engaged with M. d'Alencon."

Marguerite beat her fair hands together violently.

"It is, then, too late," said she.

"On the contrary," said Henry, "the hand of Providence is visible in this; for the duke will save us all; he will be a buckler protecting us; whereas the name of the king of Navarre would involve you all, by degrees, in destruction. Get fast hold of him; secure proofs; but, silly politician that you are, you have doubtless engaged yourself already, without using any precautions."

"Sire," cried De Mouy, "despair made me join his party, and fear also, for he held our secret."

"Then hold his in your turn. What does he want?—the kingdom of Navarre? Promise it him. To quit the court? Supply him with the means. When the time comes for us to fly, he and I will fly together: when it is time to reign, I will reign alone."

"Distrust the duke," said Marguerite: "he is alike incapable of hatred and friendship; ever ready to treat his enemies as friends, and his friends as enemies."

"He awaits you?" said Henry, without heeding his wife's remark.

"Yes, sire."

"At what hour?"

"Until midnight."

"It is not yet eleven," said Henry; "you are not too late, De Mouy."

"We have your word, sir," said Marguerite.

"Come, come," said Henry, with that air of confidence he so well knew how to show to certain persons and on certain occasions; "with M. de Mouy this is needless."

"You do me justice, sire," returned the young man. "But I must have your word that I may tell our leaders that I have received it. You are not, then, a Catholic?"

Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"You do not renounce the kingdom of Navarre?"

"I do not renounce any kingdom, only I would select that which suits you and me the best."

"And, in the meantime, were your majesty to be arrested, and they should dare so to violate the regal dignity as to torture you, will you swear to reveal nothing?"

"De Mouy, I swear it."

"One word, sire. How shall I see you?"

"From to-morrow you will have a key of my chamber, and you can come in when you will. The duke must explain your presence at the Louvre. I will now guide you up the private staircase; meantime, the queen will bring in here the other cherry mantle, who was just now in the antechamber. It must not be supposed you are double; eh, De Mouy? eh, madame?"

Henry laughed as he said this, and looked at Marguerite.

"Yes," replied she, without any emotion; "for you know this M. de la Mole is one of the gentlemen of the Duke d'Alencon."

"Try and get him to our side, then," said Henry, with entire gravity; "spare neither gold nor promises; I place all my treasures at his disposal."

"Well, then," said Marguerite, with one of those smiles that belong only to

Boccaccio's heroines, "since such is your desire, I will do my best to promote it."

"Very good, madame; and now to the duke, De Mouy, and hook him."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARGUERITE.

DURING this conversation, La Mole and Coconnas remained on guard; the former marvelously vexed, and Coconnas somewhat uneasy, for La Mole had had time for reflection, and Coconnas had most liberally assisted him in it.

"What do you think of all this?" asked La Mole.

"I think," replied the Piedmontese, "that it is some intrigue of the court."

"And are you disposed to play a part in it?"

"My dear fellow!" returned Coconnas, "listen to what I shall say, and give heed thereunto. In all these royal maneuverings we are, and should be, but shadows: where the king of Navarre would only lose the end of his feather, or the Duke d'Alencon the skirt of his cloak, you and I should lose our lives. Go crazy in love, if you please, but do not meddle in politics."

"But I love the queen, Annibal; I love her with all my soul; 'tis folly, I admit; but you, Coconnas, who are prudent, must not suffer by my folly. Seek our master, and do not compromise yourself."

Coconnas reflected an instant, then, shaking his head:

"My dear fellow!" said he, "what you say is very just; you are in love, and you act like a lover; I am ambitious, and think life worth more than the smile of a woman. When I risk my life, I will make my own terms, and do you, on your part, do the same."

So saying, Coconnas pressed La Mole's hand and left him.

About ten minutes after, the door opened cautiously, and Marguerite appeared. Without speaking a word, she led La Mole into her apartment, closing the doors with a care that showed the importance of the conversation she was about to open.

Arrived in her chamber, she sat down in her ebony chair, and taking La Mole's hands in hers:

"Now that we are alone, my friend," said she, "we will talk seriously."

"Seriously, madame?" said La Mole.

"Or confidentially, if you like the word better. There may be serious things in confidential conversations, especially in those of a queen."

"Let us speak seriously, then; but on condition that your majesty be not offended with what I shall say."

"I shall only be offended at one thing, La Mole, and that is, if you call me 'madame' or 'your majesty'; for you, I am only Marguerite."

"Yes, Marguerite! yes, Marguerite!" cried the young man, gazing passionately at the queen.

"That is well," said Marguerite; "and so you are jealous, my fair sir?"

"Oh, madly!"

"Ah! and of whom?"

"Of every one."

"But of whom in particular?"

"First, of the king."

"I thought, after what you had seen and heard, you were easy on that score."

"Of this M. de Mouy, whom I saw this morning for the first time, and whom I find this evening on such intimate terms with you."

"And what makes you jealous of De Mouy?"

"I recognized him by his air, his figure; by a natural feeling of hate: it is he who was with M. d'Alencon this morning."

"Well, what has he to do with me?"

"That I know not. But in default of any other return, a love like mine is entitled to frankness on your part. See, madame, at your feet I implore you! If what you have felt for me is but a temporary inclination, I give you back your faith and your promises; I will resign my post to M. d'Alencon, and go and seek death at the siege of Rochelle, if love does not kill me before I arrive there!"

Marguerite listened with a smile to these tender reproaches, then, leaning her head on his burning hand:

"You love me?" she said.

"Oh, yes, madame, more than life! But you do not love me?"

"Silly fellow!" murmured she; "and so the sole interest of life with you is your love?"——"It is indeed, madame."

"You love me, then, and would fain remain with me?"

"My only prayer is, that I may never part from you."

"Were I to tell you I love you, should you be wholly devoted to me?"

"Am I not so already?"

"Yes; but you still doubt."

"Oh, I am an ingrate, or rather, I am mad; but tell me, why was M. de Mouy this morning with the Duke d'Alencon? why here to-night? what meant the white plume, the cherry-colored mantle, the imitating my walk and manner?"

"Can you not guess? The Duke d'Alencon would kill you with his own hand, did he know you were here at my feet; and that, instead of ordering you to quit my presence, I said to you then as I now say, stay where you are, for I love you."

"All gratitude to you for the word," murmured La Mole.

"Listen," continued the queen; "it was not for me that M. de Mouy came here in your hat and cloak; it was for M. d'Alencon; but I mistook him for you; I spoke to him, thinking it was you; I led him hither, thinking it was you. He possesses our secret, La Mole, and must be managed cautiously."

"I had rather kill him," said La Mole; "'tis the shortest and safest way."

"And I," said the queen, "had rather he should live, and that you should know all. Now answer me truly, La Mole; do you love me enough to rejoice if I were to become really queen?"

"Alas, madame," said La Mole, "I love you enough to desire whatever you desire, though it involved myself in utter misery!"

"Will you, then, aid me to realize this object?"

"Oh, I shall lose you!" cried La Mole, burying his face in his hands.

"No; only, instead of being the first of my servants, you will become the first of my subjects."

"Oh, speak not of interest, of ambition! Do not dishonor the sentiment I have for you!—my devotion, my ardent, my unmixed devotion!"

"Noble nature!" said the queen; "I will accept your devotion, and, be assured, will repay it."

And she held out her hands, which La Mole pressed in his own.

"Well!" said she.

"Well, yes," replied La Mole; "I now begin to understand the project spoken of by the Huguenots before the Bartholomew; the project, to aid in which, I, with so many others, came to Paris. De Mouy conspires with you; but what has the Duke d'Alencon to do with all this? Is he sufficiently your friend to aid you, without demanding anything in return?"

"The duke conspires for himself. Let him go on his own way; his life answers for ours."

"But how can I, who am in his service, betray him?"

"Betray him! how so? What has he intrusted to you? Has he not betrayed you, by giving De Mouy your mantle and hat to enable him to come here? Were you not in my service before you were in his? Has he given you a greater proof of his friendship than I have of love?"

La Mole rose, pale and agitated.

"Coconnas was right," murmured he; "I am becoming entangled in the net of intrigue, and it will destroy me."

"Well," said Marguerite.

"This is my answer," returned La Mole. "Even at the extremity of France, where the reputation of your beauty reached me, and gave me my first desire to visit Paris, that I might see you, I have heard it said, that you have often loved, and that your love has always been fatal to its objects; death, doubtless jealous of their happiness, removed them from you. Do not interrupt me, Marguerite. It is added that you have ever with you the embalmed hearts of these departed ones, and that, at times, you bestow on these sad remains a piteous sigh, perchance a tear. You sigh, my queen, your eyes are lowered to the ground; it is true, then? Well; let me be favored as

these were, only with this difference; swear that if (as a somber presentiment assures me I shall) I perish beneath the executioner's stroke in your service, you will preserve that head which I shall forfeit, and will sometimes look upon it. Swear this, and the prospect of such a reward shall make me be, or do, whatever you command me."

"Oh, gloomy foreboding!" said the queen.

"Swear!"——"Swear?"

"Yes, on this cross-surmounted coffer."

"I swear," said Marguerite, "that if your somber presentiment be realized, you shall be near me, living or dead, so long as I myself shall live; if I cannot save you, you shall have the poor consolation you ask, and which you will have so well merited."

"One word more, Marguerite—I can now die happily; but I may live; we may triumph, and not fall. The king of Navarre may become king, you will then be queen; he will take you hence; the vow of separation between you may one day be broken, and lead to my separation from you. Oh! dearest Marguerite, reassure me also on this point."

"Fear not," cried Marguerite, placing her hand on the cross; "if I go, you shall accompany me; if the king refuses to take you, I myself will not depart."

"But you will not dare resist him."

"Dear Hyacinthe," said Marguerite, "you do not know the king; Henry thinks but of one thing, that of becoming a king, and to that he would sacrifice all; and now, farewell!"

From this evening La Mole was no longer a common favorite, and he could proudly hold up that head, for which, living or dead, so high a destiny was reserved. Yet sometimes his eyes were fixed on the ground, his cheek grew pale, and deep meditation drew furrows on the brow of the young man, once so gay, now so happy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE.

As Henry left Madame de Sauve, he said to her:

"Charlotte, confine yourself to your bed; pretend to be exceedingly ill, and do not receive any person during the day under any pretext whatsoever."

Charlotte, knowing that Henry had secrets which he revealed to no one, complied with all his directions, certain that his conduct was based on some good and sufficing grounds.

Thus, in the evening, she complained to her attendant Dariole of a heaviness in the head, accompanied with faintness, these being the symptoms Henry had requested her to feign.

The next morning she seemed desirous of rising, but scarcely had she placed her foot on the floor than she complained of general weakness, and returned to her bed.

This indisposition, which Henry had already adverted to when speaking to the Duke d'Alencon, was the first information that Catherine received, when she inquired, with a calm air, why La Sauve did not attend her, as usual, when she arose.

"She is ill," said Madame de Lorraine, who was present.

"Ill," repeated Catherine, while not a muscle of her face announced the interest she took in the reply; "a little indolent, perhaps?"

"No, madame," replied the princess; "she complains of a violent pain in the head, and a weakness that prevents her from moving."

Catherine made no reply, but to conceal her joy, no doubt, turned toward the window, and seeing Henry cross the courtyard, after his conversation with De Mouy, she said, as she looked at him, to her captain of the guards:

"Do you not think that my son Henry looks paler than usual this morning?"

It is true Henry was considerably disturbed in mind, but perfectly well in body.

Catherine's suite left her, and the instant she was alone she closed the door securely, and going to a secret cupboard she drew from a concealed corner a book, whose crumpled leaves proved how frequently it was made use of.

She placed the volume on a table, opened it, and after consulting its pages for a minute, exclaimed:

"Yes, it is so; headache, general weakness, pains in the eyes, swelling of the palate; as yet they only mention headache and weakness; but the other symptoms will appear anon. Then follow inflammation of the throat, which extends over the stomach, surrounds the heart with a circle of fire, and makes the brain burst like a stroke of lightning."

She read on in a low tone, and then said:

"The fever lasts six hours, the general inflammation twelve hours, the gangrene twelve hours, the final agony six hours; in all thirty-six hours.

"Well, then, let us suppose that absorption is a slower process than swallowing; instead of thirty-six hours we shall have forty, or perhaps forty-eight—yes, forty-eight must be sufficient—but he—he—Henry—how is it that he is able to keep up? Why, because he is a man of a robust habit, and perhaps drank something after he had kissed her, and wiped his lips after drinking."

Catherine impatiently awaited the dinner-hour—Henry dined with the king daily. When he came, he complained of giddiness in the head, and did not eat, but withdrew immediately after dinner, saying that, as he had been up nearly all the night before, he felt a great desire to sleep.

Catherine listened to Henry's retreating and staggering step, and desired some one to follow him, which was done, and the queen-mother was informed that the king of Navarre had gone toward Madame de Sauve's apartment.

"Henry," she said to herself, "will there complete the work of death which unlucky accident may hitherto have rendered incomplete."

The king of Navarre had gone to Madame de Sauve's apartment, to request her to continue to play her part.

Next day Henry did not quit his chamber all the morning, nor did he dine at the royal table. Madame de Sauve, it was reported, was worse and worse, and the rumors of Henry's illness, spread by Catherine herself, spread like one of those presentiments which no one can explain.

Catherine awaited, then, with curiosity, with expectation, the moment when some attendant, pale and aghast, should enter her apartment, and cry:

"Your majesty, the king of Navarre is dying, and Madame de Sauve is dead."

The clock struck four, and Catherine was feeding with crumbs of bread some rare birds which she herself attended to. Although her features were calm, and even melancholy, her heart beat violently at the least sound.

Suddenly the door opened.

"Madame," said the captain of the guards, "the king of Navarre is—"

"Ill?" inquired Catherine, suddenly.

"No, madame, thank God! his majesty seems excellently well."

"What then have you to say?"

"That the king of Navarre is here."

"What would he with me?"

"He brings your majesty a small monkey of a very rare sort."

And at this moment Henry entered, holding in his hand a basket, and caressing an onistiti (a small species of the monkey) which was in it.

Henry smiled as he entered, and appeared quite occupied with the small animal he had brought; but yet, preoccupied as he was, he gave a glance which was sufficient under his peculiar circumstances. As to Catherine, she was very pale—deadly pale, indeed, as she saw the cheeks of the young man, as he approached her, glowing with color and health.

The queen-mother was stupefied at this, and accepting mechanically the present he made her, and complimenting him in a troubled voice on his healthy appearance, added:

"I am the more pleased to see you in such health, my son, after having heard that you had been unwell; and I remember you complained of indisposition in my presence; but I see now," she continued, trying to force a smile, "it was only an excuse that you might have your time more freely to yourself."

"Why, I really was very unwell, madame," replied Henry; "but a specific used in our mountains, and which my mother gave me, cured my indisposition."

"Ah! you will give me the prescription, won't you, Henry?" said Catherine, really smiling this time, but with irony half concealed.

"Some counter-poison," she muttered; "or he was on his guard: seeing Madame de Sauve ill, he had some distrust. Really, it would seem that the hand of Providence is extended over this man."

Catherine awaited for night most impatiently. Madame de Sauve did not appear; and it was stated that she was still worse. All the evening the queen-mother was uneasy; and every one asked what could be the thoughts that thus agitated a countenance usually so little agitated.

Every one retired. Catherine went to bed, and was undressed by her woman; but, when all was hushed in the Louvre, she rose, put on a long black dressing-gown, and with a lamp in her hand, having selected the key that opened Madame de Sauve's door, went to the apartment of her maid of honor.

Had Henry anticipated this visit? Was he in his own apartment? Was he hidden somewhere? The young lady was alone.

Catherine opened the door with precaution, passed through the antechamber, entered the salon, placed the lamp on a table, for there was a night light burning near the invalid, and like a shadow she glided into the sleeping apartment.

Dariole, extended in a large armchair, was sleeping near her mistress's bed, which was closed in by curtains.

The breathing of the young lady was so light, that, for an instant, Catherine thought she did not breathe at all.

At length she heard a light respiration, and, with malignant joy, she raised the curtain that she might herself witness the effect of the terrible poison, and she shuddered at the anticipated aspect of the livid paleness, or the devouring purple, of the mortal fever she hoped to see; but, instead of that, calm, her eyes gently covered by their ivory lids, her mouth rosy and half-opened, her soft cheek reposing on one of her arms, beautifully rounded, while the other, fresh and beautiful, was extended on the crimson damask counterpane, the young lady was sleeping with a smile on her lovely features.

Catherine could not repress a cry, which aroused Dariole for an instant.

The queen-mother threw herself behind the bed-curtains. Dariole opened her eyes, but being drowsy, she did not even try to account to herself for the cause of her awaking, and her heavy eyelids again dropping, she soon slept.

Catherine then coming from behind the curtain, looking all around, saw on a small table a flask of Spanish wine, some sweetmeats, and two glasses. Henry had supped with the baroness, who was as well as himself.

Catherine then going to the toilet-table, took up the small box, which was one-third empty. It was the same, or similar to that she had given. She took from it a morsel of the size of a pearl, at the end of a gold pin, returned to her own apartment, and offered it to the small monkey which Henry had presented to her the same evening. The animal, tempted by the aromatic, seized and swallowed it greedily, and curling himself up in his basket, went to sleep. Catherine waited a quarter of an hour.

"With half such a piece," she said, "my dog Brunot died in a minute. I have been trifled with. Can it be Rene? Rene! that is impossible. Then, it is Henry. Cursed fatality, it is clear; as he must reign, he cannot die. Perhaps it is only poison against which he is proof: let us then try cold steel."

Catherine went to her couch, turning over in her mind this fresh idea, which she resolved on essaying next day; and, in the morning, summoning the captain of her guards, she gave him a letter to convey to its address, and to be handed only to the person whose name it bore.

It was addressed to "Sirè de Louviers de Maurevel, Captain of the King's Petardiers, Rue de la Cerisaie, near the Arsenal."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LETTER FROM ROME.

SOME days had elapsed since the events we have related, when one morning a

litter, escorted by several gentlemen wearing the colors of M. de Guise, entered the Louvre; and it was announced to the queen of Navarre that the Duchesse de Nevers desired to pay her respects to her.

Marguerite was receiving a visit from Madame de Sauve. It was the first time the lovely baroness had gone out since her pretended illness.

Marguerite congratulated her on her convalescence, and said:

"You will come, I hope, to the great hunt, which will certainly take place to-morrow."

"Why, madame," replied the baroness, "I do not know that I shall be well enough."

"Bah," replied Marguerite, "you must make an exertion; and as I myself am a regular warrior, I have authorized the king to place at your disposal a small Béarn horse, which I was to have ridden, and which will carry you famously. So you must accompany us."

"Your majesty overwhelms me, and I will be present, as you desire it."

At this moment the Duchesse de Nevers was announced.

"To-morrow, then," said Marguerite, to Madame de Sauve. "Apropos, you know, baroness," continued Marguerite, "that in public I detest you, seeing that I am horribly jealous of you."

"But in private?" asked Madame de Sauve.

"Oh! in private I not only forgive you, but even thank you."

"Then your majesty will allow me—"

Marguerite extended her hand, which the baroness kissed respectfully, made a low curtsey, and left the apartment.

The Duchesse de Nevers entered. Gillonne, at the desire of her mistress, fastened the door, and the duchess, taking a seat without ceremony, Marguerite said to her, with a smile:

"Well! and our famous swordsman—what do we make out of him?"

"My dear queen," replied the duchess, "he is really a mythological being; he is incomparable in his mind, and endless in his humor; I am really fond of him: and how goes on your Apollo?"

"Alas!" said Marguerite, with a sigh.

"Ah, ah! that *alas!* frightens me, dear queen."

"This *alas!* only refers to myself," replied Marguerite.

"And what does it mean?"

"It means, dear duchesse, that I have an awful fear that I love him in real earnest."——"Really?"

"On my faith, as a woman!"

"Ah, so much the better!" cried Henriette. "It is so pleasant, dear and learned queen, to rest one's mind on a faithful and fond heart. Ah, Marguerite, I have a presentiment that we shall pass an agreeable year."

"Do you think so?" said the queen. "I, on the contrary, do not know how it is, but I appear to see everything as it were through a crape. All these political turmoils torment me terribly. By the way, learn if your Annibal is as much devoted to my brother as he appears to be. It is important to know this."

"He devoted to anything! Ah! I see, you do not know him as I do. If he is ever devoted, it will be to ambition, and nothing else. There are really moments when this tiger, whom I have trained, makes me afraid for myself. The other day I said to him: 'Annibal, mind and do not be false to me, for if you are false to me—'"

"Well?"

"Well, what do you suppose was his reply? Why, he said: 'And if you are false to me, do you take care, for although you are a princess—;' and as he said so, he threatened me not only with his eyes, but with his finger—his finger, straight and pointed, and with a nail cut like a spear-point, which he put quite close under my nose; really, my dear queen, I confess his countenance was so threatening that I trembled, and you know that ordinarily I am no trembler."

"Did he really threaten you, Henriette?"

"Yes, mordi! but I had threatened him, you see."

"Have you any news for me?"

"Yes, indeed; I have received news from Rome."

"Well! and matters in Poland?"

"Progress most favorably; and in all probability you will in a few days be freed from your brother D'Anjou."

"The pope, then, has ratified the election?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Why did you not tell me sooner? Come, quick, quick!—all the details."

"Oh, ma foi! I have none but what I have told you. But here is my husband De Nevers' letter. No, that is not it; that is a billet from me, which I will beg of you to ask La Mole to give to Annibal. This is the duke's letter."

Marguerite opened and read it eagerly, but it told no more than she knew before from the lips of her friend.

"And how did you receive this letter?" continued the queen.

"By one of my husband's couriers, who had his orders to stop at the Hotel de Guise on his way to the Louvre, and hand me this letter, before the king had his. I knew the importance which my queen attached to this news, and wrote to M. de Nevers to do so. And now in all Paris, none but the king, you and I, know this news, unless the man who followed our courier—"

"What man?"

"Oh, what a horrible business! Only imagine this poor messenger arriving tired, dusty and jaded, after traveling for a whole week, day and night incessantly, constantly followed by a man of fierce visage, who had relays, like his own, and traveled as fast as he for these four hundred leagues, our courier expecting every moment to have a ball in his back. They both arrived at the Barriere St. Marcel at the same time—both descended the Rue Mouffetard at a gallop—both crossed the Cité; but at the end of the bridge Notre-Dame, our courier turned to the right, while the other turned to the left by the Place du Chatelet, and passed along the Quais by the Louvre, like a bolt from a bow."

"Thanks! thanks! dearest Henriette," cried Marguerite; "you are right, and your information is indeed interesting. Who this other courier is I will find out. Leave me now; we meet to-night in the Rue Tizon, do we not, and to-morrow at the hunt? I will tell you to-night what I wish you to learn from your Coconnas."

"Do not forget my letter."

"No, no; be easy, he shall have it in time."

Madame de Nevers went away, and Marguerite instantly sent for Henry, who hastened to her, and she gave him the letter, and told him of the two couriers.

"Yes," said Henry; "I saw one enter the Louvre."

"Perhaps for the queen-mother."

"No, for I went into the corridor, and no one passed.

"Then," said Marguerite, looking at her husband, "it must be for—"

"Your brother D'Alencon, eh?" said Henry.

"Yes; but how to ascertain?"

"Can we not," asked Henry negligently, "send for one of the two gentlemen, and learn from him—"

"You are right, sire," replied Marguerite, set at ease by her husband's proposition. "I will send for M. de la Mole;" and calling Gillonne, she desired her to seek that gentleman, and bring him thither.

Henry seated himself at a table, on which was a German book with Albert Durer's engravings, which he looked at with so much attention, that when La Mole appeared he did not seem to hear him, not even raising his head.

Marguerite went to La Mole, and said:

"M. de la Mole, can you tell me who is on guard to-day at M. d'Alencon's?"

"Coconnas, madame," was the reply.

"Endeavor to learn if he has introduced to his master a man covered with mud, who seemed to have ridden a long and rapid journey."

"Madame, I am afraid he will not tell me, for he has been uncommonly taciturn during the last few days."

"Really? Well, but if you give him this billet, I should think he would owe you something in exchange."

"From the duchesse? Ah, madame, let me have it, and I will answer for all;" and taking the letter, he went quickly away

"We shall know to-morrow if the Duke d'Alencon is informed of the affair of Poland," said Marguerite, turning toward her husband.

"This M. de la Mole is really a very capital servant," said the Béarnais, with his own most peculiar smile, "and, by the mass! I will make his fortune."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEPARTURE.

WHEN the red rayless sun rose next morning over Paris, the court had already been in motion for two hours.

A splendid barb, agile as a deer, the swelling veins of whose neck indicated his high breeding, pawed impatiently in the court, awaiting the king; but his impatience was less than his master's, detained by his mother, who wished to speak of an affair of the greatest importance.

They were both in the great gallery: Catherine pale and cold as ever; Charles IX. biting his nails, and chastising the two favorite dogs which stood by him, clothed in the coat of mail which protected them from the boar's tusks. A shield emblazoned with the arms of France was attached to their chests, like that on the breasts of the royal pages.

"Listen, Charles," said Catherine. "None but you and I are aware of the approaching arrival of the Polish ambassadors; and yet the king of Navarre acts as if he knew of it. In spite of his pretended abjuration, he keeps up a correspondence with the Huguenots. Have you remarked how frequently he has gone out, within the last few days? He has money—he who never before had any; he purchases horses and weapons, and when it rains, he practices fencing."

"Bah! mother," cried Charles, impatiently; "do you think he is going to kill D'Anjou or myself; he must take a few more lessons first: for yesterday I touched with my foil the buttons of his doublet eleven times, though there are but six of them; and D'Anjou is even more skillful than I, or, at least, he says so."

"Attend, Charles," said Catherine, "and do not treat your mother's warnings with such levity. These ambassadors will soon arrive: once here, you will see Henry doing his best to gain their attention; he is very insinuating and cunning, and his wife, who now abets him, I don't understand why, will chatter Latin and Greek, Hungarian, and I know not what else, with them. I tell you, Charles, and I am never mistaken, there is something in hand."

At this moment the clock struck. Charles listened.

"Mort de ma vie! seven; an hour to get there, an hour more at cover; zounds! it will be nine before we are at it! Down, Risque-tout!—down, you rascal!"

And as he spoke, a vigorous lash drew from the poor hound, astonished at receiving chastisement instead of a caress, a yell of agony.

"Charles," resumed Catherine, "attend to me, and do not thus put to hazard your own fortune and that of France. The chase! the chase! you will have time enough for the chase, when you have completed the work before us."

"Bah! bah! mother," said Charles, pale with rage; "tell me, at once, what you want."

And he struck his boot with his whip.

Catherine saw the favorable moment had arrived, and determined not to let it slip.

"My son," said she, "we know that M. de Mouy is again in Paris; M. de Maurevel has seen him. He can only be here for the king of Navarre's purposes. Here is good ground for increased suspicion."

"Ah, here you are again at poor Harry! I suppose you want me to kill him."

"Oh no!"

"To banish him? But don't you perceive he would be more formidable at a distance than here, in the Louvre, where we know everything he does?"

"No, I don't want to banish him."

"What, then? Come, quick!"

"I would have him confined while the Poles are here; in the Bastille, for instance."

"Oh, ma foi! no," cried Charles IX. "We are going to hunt the boar this morning; Henry is one of my best assist-

ants. The chase would be nothing without him. Mordieu! you do nothing but annoy me."

"My son, I do not say to-day; to-morrow will be time enough."

"Ah, that is different; we will speak again of this, after the hunt, say. Adieu! Come, Risque-tout, don't be sulky!"

"Charles," said Catherine, taking hold of his arm, spite of the explosion she knew might follow, "I think it would be best to sign the warrant at once, although we do not execute it to-night."

"Sign! write an order! go and look for the seal, when I am going to hunt? Devil take me if I do!"

"Nay, I love you too much to delay you: I have everything prepared."

And Catherine, agile as a girl, opened the door of her private cabinet, and showed the king an ink-stand, a pen, a parchment, and a lighted taper.

The king rapidly ran his eye over the parchment:

"Order, etc., etc., to arrest and conduct to the Bastille our brother Henry of Navarre."

"There!" said he, hastily affixing his name to it.

And he sprang out of the cabinet, glad to escape so easily.

Charles was waited for impatiently; and as his punctuality in hunting arrangements was well known, his non-appearance occasioned no small surprise. The instant he appeared, the hunters saluted him with cheers, the whippers-in with their horns, the horses with neighings, and the hounds with their most sweet voices. Charles, for a moment, was young and happy amid all this noise, and the color mounted up into his pallid cheeks.

He scarcely gave himself time to return the salutations of the brilliant assembly. He nodded to D'Alencon, waved his hand to Marguerite, passed Henry without seeming to observe him, and sprang upon the horse that awaited him. The noble animal bounded impatiently, but soon comprehending with how perfect an equestrian it had to deal, became quiet.

The horns once more sounded, and the king left the Louvre, followed by the Duke d' Alencon, the king of Navarre, Marguerite, Madame de Nevers, Madame de Sauve, Tavannes, and the chief nobles of the court.

As for the Duke d'Anjou, he had been at the siege of Rochelle for the last three months.

While waiting for the king, Henry had approached his wife, who whispered:

"The courier from Rome was conducted by M. de Coconnas to the Duke d'Alencon a quarter of an hour before the Duke de Nevers' messenger saw the king."

"Then he knows all."

"He needs must. Look at him; despite his accomplished dissimulation, he cannot conceal his joy."

"Ventre-saint-gris!" said the Béarnais, "he is hunting three thrones today: France, Poland, and Navarre, without reckoning the boar."

Then, saluting his wife, Henry returned to his place, and called one of his servants, a Béarnese, whom he was in the habit of employing in his love affairs.

"Orthon," said he, "take this key to Madame de Sauve's cousin, at this house, the corner of the Rue des Quatre-fils. Tell him his cousin wishes to see him this evening; that he is to go to my chamber; if I am not there, he is to wait for me; and if I am late, he can lay down in my bed."

"There is no answer, sire?"

"None, except to tell me if you have seen him. The key is for him only, you understand?"

"Yes, sire."

"Stop, blockhead, you must not go off now: it would create observation. Before we leave Paris, I will call you, as if my girth was slackened; then you can wait behind, discharge your commission, and join us at Bondy."

Orthon bowed and drew back.

The cavalcade passed down the Rue St. Honore, the Rue St. Denis, then the Fauxbourg. At the Rue St. Laurent, the king's saddle became ungirthed; Orthon galloped up, and everything passed as the king had arranged. The royal cortege passed down the Rue des Recollets, and

the faithful valet dashed into the Rue du Temple.

When Henry rejoined the king, he was so busy talking to D'Alencon about the expected boar that he either did not perceive or affected not to perceive that Henry had stayed behind.

Madame Marguerite remarked that her brother seemed embarrassed whenever he glanced at Henry. Madame de Nevers was in high glee, for Coconnas was in capital vein with his jests.

At a quarter past eight the cortege arrived at Bondy.

Charles's first care was to inquire whether the boar had broken cover. The boar, however, the huntsman assured him, was still in his lair.

A collation was prepared; the king drank a glass of Hungarian wine; then, inviting the ladies to seat themselves, he went to inspect the kennels and the mews, having first given strict orders that his horse should not be unsaddled meanwhile.

During his absence, the Duke de Guise arrived; he was armed as if for war, rather than for the chase, and was attended by twenty or thirty gentlemen in similar array. He went to seek the king, and returned conversing with him.

At nine o'clock, the king himself sounded the signal for departure, and every one mounting, hastened to the place of meeting. During the journey, Henry again approached his wife.

"Well," said he, "anything new?"

"Nothing, except that my brother looks very strangely at you."

"I have remarked it myself."

"Have you taken your precautions?"

"I have my shirt of mail on, and an excellent Spanish couteau-de-chasse, sharp as a razor, pointed as a needle, with which I can pierce a crown-piece."

"Well," said Marguerite, "may God guard us!"

The huntsman gave a signal; they were at the boar's lair.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAUREVEL.

WHILE the glittering cortege proceeded toward Bondy, the queen-mother, rolling up the parchment the king had signed, gave orders to have introduced to her presence the man to whom the captain of her guards had remitted a letter some days previously, "Rue de la Cerisaie, Quartier de l'Arsenal."

A large band of sarsanet covered one of his eyes and only just left the other visible. His cheek-bones were high, and his nose curved like the beak of a vulture; a grizzled beard covered his chin; he wore a large thick cloak, beneath which were evident the hilts of a whole arsenal of weapons. He had at his side a heavy broadsword, with a basket hilt, and one of his hands grasped underneath his cloak a long poniard.

"Ah, you are here!" said the queen, seating herself. "I promised to reward you for the services you rendered us the night of the St. Bartholomew, and I have found an opportunity of so doing."

"I humbly thank your majesty," replied the man.

"An opportunity, such as may never again present itself, of distinguishing yourself."

"I am ready, madame; but I fear, from the preamble, that—"

"That the commission is a rough one. It is, indeed; 'tis one which might be coveted by a Guise or a Tavannes."

"Madame, whatever it be, I am at your orders."

"Read that," said Catherine; and she gave him the parchment.

He read it, and turned pale.

"What!" cried he; "an order to arrest the king of Navarre?"

"Well, what is there so very astonishing in that!"

"But a king, madame! I doubt if I am gentleman enough to arrest a king."

"The confidence I repose in you makes you the first gentleman in my court."

"I thank your majesty," returned the assassin—with some hesitation, however.

"You will obey me, then?"

"If your majesty commands me, it is my duty to obey."

"I do command you."

"Then I obey."

"How will you proceed?"

"I scarcely know — I would fain be guided by your majesty."

"You would do it quietly?"

"I confess it."

"Take twelve men, or even more, if necessary."

"I understand; your majesty permits me to make use of every advantage. But where shall I seize the king of Navarre?"

"Where would you prefer?"

"I should prefer some place where my responsibility—"

"Ah, I understand—a royal palace: the Louvre, for instance."

"Oh, if your majesty would permit this it would be a great favor."

"Arrest him in the Louvre, then."

"In what part?"

"In his own apartments."

Maurevel bowed.

"And when, madame?"

"To-night."

"It shall be done, madame. But deign to tell me what regard I am to have for his rank?"

"Regard! — rank!" said Catherine. "Know you not that the king of France acknowledges no one of a rank equal to his own, in France?"

"Yet one other question, madame. Should the king contest the authenticity of this order—it is not unlikely—but—"

"On the contrary, it is certain—"

"That he will contest it?"

"Without doubt."

"And that, consequently, he will refuse to obey it?"——"I fear so."

"And will resist it?"

"Most likely."

"Zounds!" said Maurevel; "in that case—"

"In what case?" asked Catherine.

"In case he resists."

"What do you do when you have the king's warrant, and a simple gentleman resists you?"

"I kill him, madame," returned the bravo.

"I told you just now that every one in France is, in the king's eyes, but a simple gentleman."

Maurevel turned pale, for he began to understand.

"Oh, oh!" said he, "kill the king of Navarre?"

"Who spoke of killing him? This order is only to conduct him to the Bastille. If he suffers himself to be arrested quietly, well and good; but if he resists, and seeks to kill you—"

Maurevel grew still paler.

"You will, of course, defend yourself. A brave soldier like you cannot be expected to suffer himself to be killed; and then, in your own defense, happen what will—you understand?"

"Yes, madame."

"Come, you want me to write on the order the words—*Dead or alive?*"

"I confess that would remove my scruples."

"Well—I must do it, I suppose."

And unrolling the warrant with one hand, with the other she wrote, "*Dead or alive.*"

"Is the order sufficiently formal now?" she asked.

"Yes, madame: but I pray you, let me have the execution of it entirely to myself."

"Will anything I have said interfere?"

"Your majesty bade me take twelve men."

"Well?"

"I request your permission to take only six."

"Why?"

"Because six guards may be excused for being afraid of losing a prisoner; twelve would never be."

"Do as you will," said Catherine. "Meantime, you must not quit the Louvre."

"Bnt how shall I collect my men?"

"Have you no person you can employ in this?"

"There is my servant, a trusty fellow, who sometimes aids me in such things."

"Send for him and arrange your plans. You will breakfast in the king's armory. When he returns from hunting, you can go to my oratory, and wait there till the hour comes."

"How shall we get into the king's chamber? he, doubtless, has his suspicions, and fastens the door within."

"I have keys that open all the doors in the Louvre; and the bolts have been removed from his door. Adieu, M. de Maurevel. Remember, any failure would compromise the king's honor."

And Catherine, without leaving Maurevel time to reply, called M. de Nancey, the captain of her guards, and bade him conduct Maurevel into the king's armory.

"Mordieu!" said Maurevel. "I am rising in my profession. First I killed a simple gentleman, then I shot at an admiral, now 'tis a king without a crown: who knows but some day I may have to settle a king with a crown!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BOAR-HUNT.

THE huntsman was not deceived when he affirmed that the game had not broken covert. Scarcely had the hounds entered, when the boar, which was, as the huntsman had said, one of the largest size, appeared.

The animal passed within fifty paces of the king, followed only by the hound which had roused him; but twenty dogs were speedily uncoupled, and laid on his track.

The chase was Charles's passion; and scarcely had the animal appeared than he dashed after him, followed by the Duke d'Alencon and Henry, who had received a sign from Marguerite, warning him not to lose sight of the king. The other huntsmen followed.

In a quarter of an hour some impassable thickets presented themselves, and Charles returned to the glade, cursing and swearing as was his wont:

"Zounds! D'Alencon, zounds! Harry, here you are, calm and milklike as nuns following the abbess in procession. Do you call that hunting? You, D'Alencon, look as if you had just come out of a box; you are so perfumed, that if you get between the boar and the dogs, you will spoil the scent; and you, Harry, where is your boar-spear? where is your arquebuse?"

"Sire," said Henry, "what is the use of an arquebuse? I know your majesty likes to shoot the boar at bay. As for the boar-spear, it is never used in my country, where we hunt the bear with the simple poniard."

"Mordieu!" replied Charles, "you must send me a cartload of bears when you go back to the Pyrenees. It must be glorious sport to contend foot to foot with an animal that may strangle one in a minute. Hark! I think I hear them. No!"

The king blew a blast on his horn that was answered by several others. At this moment a huntsman appeared and sounded another note.

"Seen! seen!" cried the king; and he set spurs to his horse, followed by all around him.

The huntsman was right; as the king advanced, the pack, now composed of more than sixty dogs, was heard distinctly. The king no sooner saw the boar pass a second time, than he pursued him at full speed, blowing his horn with all his might.

The princes followed him some time: but the king's horse was so strong, and bore him over such difficult ways, through such thick coverts, that first the ladies, then the Duke de Guise and the gentlemen, and then the two princes, were fain to draw rein. Tavannes followed him awhile longer, but he, in his turn, was compelled to give it up.

All then, except the king and a few huntsmen, incited by the hope of reward, found themselves near the glade they had started from. The two princes were side by side in a long, broad forest path, the Duke de Guise and his attendants at some little distance on.

"Does it not seem," said the Duke d'Alencon to Henry, "that this man, with his armed retinue, is the real king? He does not deign to glance at us poor princes."

"Why should he treat us better than we are treated by our own relations? You and I are but the hostages of our party at the court."

The duke started and looked at Henry, as if calling for further explanation, but the latter remained silent.

"What mean you?" asked Francois, evidently chagrinned at his brother-in-

law's compelling him to pursue the subject.

"I mean," returned Henry, "that all these armed men seem like guards stationed to prevent two persons from escaping."

"From escaping! why? how?" asked the duke, with admirably affected surprise.

"You have a magnificent genet there, D'Alencon," said Henry, affecting to change the conversation, and yet adroitly pursuing the subject; "I am sure he would do fourteen miles in an hour, and forty between this and midday. See, what a beautiful cross-road there is that way: does it not invite you to loosen rein? As for me, I should like a gallop vastly."

Francois made no reply, but turned very red, and affected to listen for the hunters.

"The news from Poland has taken effect," thought Henry. "My dear brother-in-law has a plan of his own. He is willing enough I should be off; but I don't fly alone, he may rely upon it."

At this moment several converts from Protestantism, who had been but a short time at the court, came up, and saluted the princes with a meaning smile.

The Duke d'Alencon needed but to say one word, to make but one sign; for it was evident that the thirty or forty cavaliers collected, as if by chance, round him, were ready to oppose M. de Guise's troop, and favor his flight. The duke, however, turned his head, and placing his horn to his lips, blew a recall.

Still, the new-comers, as if they believed the duke's hesitation arose from the presence of the Guisards, gradually placed themselves between that party and the princes, in a manner that showed they were well accustomed to military maneuvers. In order to reach the Duke d'Alencon and the king of Navarre, it would be necessary for the Guise party to pass through them; while as far as the eye could reach, the cross-road was free.

Suddenly, between the trees, at ten paces from the king, appeared a gentleman, whom the two princes had not yet seen. While Henry was conjecturing who he could be, he raised his hat, and displayed the features of the Vicomte de Turenne, one of the Protestant leaders, who was believed to be in Poictou.

The vicomte made a sign that asked:

"Will you come?"

But Henry, after consulting the immovable visage of the Duke d'Alencon, turned his head two or three times, as if something in his collar hurt him.

The vicomte understood him, and instantly disappeared.

Suddenly the hounds were again heard; and at the extremity of the ride, in which were the princes, the boar passed, and then the dogs, and then, looking like the wild huntsman, Charles, bareheaded, and blowing his horn furiously: three or four huntsmen rode after him: Tavannes was not there.

"The king!" cried D'Alencon, and he instantly galloped after him.

Reassured by the presence of his friends, whom he motioned not to leave him, Henry advanced to the ladies.

"Well," said Marguerite.

"Well, madame," said Henry, "we are hunting the boar."

"Is that all?"

"The wind has changed since the morning, as I predicted to you it would."

"These changes of the wind are very bad for hunting, are they not, sir?" said Marguerite.

"Yes; sometimes they disturb all our arrangements, and we have to form a new plan altogether."

The pack was now heard, and every one turned to listen.

Suddenly the boar broke out of the wood and dashed by the ladies and their gallants.

Behind him, close on his haunches, came forty or fifty hounds, and then the king, bareheaded, without hat or mantle, his dress torn by the thorns, his hands and face all bloody; only one or two huntsmen kept up with him.

"Hallali! hallali!" cried he, as he passed, placing his horn to his bleeding lips, and boar, dogs, and king disappeared like a vision.

Immediately after them came D'Alencon, and two or three piqueurs.

Every one followed, for it was plain the boar would soon be brought to bay.

And so it happened: in less than ten minutes, the boar, coming to an open spot, placed his back against a rock, and prepared himself for a desperate struggle.

The most interesting moment of the chase was come: the dogs, though well-nigh breathless with a chase of more than three hours, rushed upon the boar.

All the hunters ranged themselves in a circle—the king a little in advance, the Duke d'Alencon behind him with his arquebuse, and Henry, who had only his hunting-knife.

The Duke d'Alencon lighted the match of his arquebuse; Henry loosened his knife in its sheath.

The Duke de Guise, who despised all such sports, remained in the background with his party.

At some distance was a piqueur who with difficulty held back the king's two huge boar-hounds, which, struggling and baying, awaited anxiously the moment when they should be let loose upon their prey.

The animal fought most gallantly; attacked at once by forty dogs, surrounding him like a raging sea, he at every stroke of his tusk hurled into the air one of the gallant creatures, torn and dying. In ten minutes, twenty dogs were killed or disabled.

"Let loose the hounds!" cried the king.

The piqueur opened the swivel of the leashes, and the two huge animals, protected by their coats of mail, dashed through the thickest of the fray, and seized the boar each by an ear.

"Bravo, Risque-tout! bravo, Dure-Dent!" cried Charles. "A boar-spear! a boar-spear!"

"Will you have my arquebuse?" said D'Alencon.

"No, no!" cried the king, "there is no pleasure in shooting him; but 'tis delicious to feel the spear going in. A spear! a spear!"

One was presented to him.

"Take care, Charles," said Marguerite.

"To him! to him!"

"Do not miss him, sire. Pierce the heretic through and through!" cried the Duchesse de Nevers.

"Never fear!" replied the king; and leveling his spear, he rushed at the boar. But at the sight of the glittering steel, the animal made so sudden a movement that the steel glanced off his shoulder, and broke against the rock. "*Milles noms d'un diable!* I have missed!" cried Charles, impatiently. "Another spear!"

And backing his steed, like the knights of old in a tournament, he cast away the broken weapon. A piqueur advanced to offer him another.

But as if he foresaw his fate, and sought to avoid it, the boar, by a violent effort, burst from the dogs, and, his hair bristling, his mouth foaming with rage, and clashing his tusks together, he rushed at Charles.

The king was too good a sportsman not to have foreseen this attack. Pulling hard on the rein, he made his horse rear; but either from the curb being too tightly pressed, or from fear, the animal fell back upon his rider.

A cry burst from every one; the king's thigh was caught between the saddle and the ground.

"Let the bridle go, sire," cried Henry.

The king abandoned his hold of the rein, seized the saddle with his left hand, and with his right strove to draw his hunting knife, but in vain; the sheath was so tightly pressed by his body as to render that impossible.

"The boar! the boar!" cried Charles. "Help, help, D'Alencon."

The horse, as if he comprehended the danger of his master, rose on his forefeet, when Henry saw D'Alencon turn ghastly pale as he placed his arquebuse to his shoulder and fired. The ball, instead of hitting the boar, struck the foreleg of the king's horse, which instantly fell again.

"Oh!" murmured D'Alencon, his lips blanched with fear, "I think that D'Anjou is king of France, and I king of Poland!"

And, in fact, the boar's tusk already grazed Charles's thigh, when the king felt his arm raised, and saw a bright blade flash before his eyes and bury itself up to the hilt behind the boar's shoulder, while a hand, gloved in iron, was dashed against the mouth of the monster.

Charles had by this time freed himself from his struggling horse, and rose with difficulty; when he saw his dress streaming with blood he grew still paler than before.

"Sire," said Henry, who, still on one knee, kept his knife in the boar's breast, "you are not hurt; I turned the tusk aside in time." He then rose, leaving the knife in the boar, which turned over dead, bleeding still more profusely from the mouth even than from the wound.

Charles, surrounded by a crowd of courtiers, all sending forth cries of terror, seemed for a moment about to fall by the dead boar; but recovering himself, he turned to the king of Navarre, with his eyes beaming with the first ray of sensibility that had touched his heart for full four-and-twenty years.

"Thanks! Harry," said he.

"My poor brother," said D'Alencon, coming up to him.

"Ah, is that you, D'Alencon!" cried the king. "Well, famous marksman that you are, where is your ball?"

"It must have flattened upon the boar, no doubt."

"Eh, mon Dieu," said Henry, with an air of surprise, admirably feigned, "your ball has broken the leg of the king's horse. How very singular!"

"Ah! is that so?" said the king.

"Perhaps," replied the duke, all consternation; "my hand trembled so."

"Humph! for a first-rate marksman you made a most curious shot, D'Alencon," said Charles, frowning; "once more, Harry, thanks!"

Marguerite advanced to congratulate the king, and thank her husband.

"Oh, by my faith, Margot, you may well thank him, heartily," said Charles; "but for him the king of France would be Henry III."

"Alas, madame," returned Henry, "M. d'Anjou, who is already my enemy, will be more than ever so, now; but every one does what he can. Ask M. d'Alencon else—"

And, stooping down, he withdrew his knife from the body of the boar, and plunged it several times into the earth to cleanse it from the blood.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," said the king, "homeward! I have had enough for one day."

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRATERNITY.

In saving the life of Charles, Henry had done more than save the life of a man—he had prevented three kingdoms from changing sovereigns.

Had Charles IX. been killed, the Duke d'Anjou would have been king of France, and the Duke d'Alencon most probably king of Poland. As to Navarre, as the Duke d'Anjou was enamored of Madame de Conde, that crown would in all probability have paid the husband for the complaisance of his wife.

In all this confusion, nothing beneficial would have arisen for Henry. He would have changed his master, that was all; and instead of Charles IX., who tolerated him, he would have seen the Duke d'Anjou on the throne, who, having but one head and one heart with his mother Catherine, had sworn his death, and would have kept his oath.

These were the ideas that floated through his brain when the wild boar had rushed on King Charles, and we have seen the result of this reflection, rapid as lightning, that the life of Charles IX. was bound up with his own existence.

Charles IX., then, was saved by a devotion whose spring and action he could not comprehend. Marguerite, however, had comprehended it fully, and had admired the strange courage of Henry, which, like lightning, shone only in the dark.

Henry, as he returned to Bondy, reflected deeply on his situation, and when he reached the Louvre, he had resolved on his plan of action. Without taking off his boots, but all dusty and covered with

blood as he was, he went to the Duke d'Alencon, whom he found greatly agitated, and pacing hastily up and down his chamber.

The prince started when he saw him.

"Yes," said Henry, to him, taking both his hands, "yes, I understand, my good brother, you are angry with me, because I was the first to call the king's attention to the fact of your ball having struck his horse's leg instead of the boar, as was your aim. But I could not repress an exclamation, and besides, the king had perceived it."

"Doubtless, doubtless!" muttered the Duke d'Alencon; "yet I cannot but attribute to a bad intention your pointing out this fact, which you must have seen has made my brother Charles suspicious of my purpose, and thrown a cloud between us."

"We will talk of this anon; and as to my good or bad intention, I have come now to make you a judge of that."

"Humph!" said D'Alencon.

"My brother, your interests are too dear to me to allow me to keep from you that the Huguenots have made me certain proposals."

"Proposals? what sort of proposals?"

"One of the leaders, M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale, and son of the brave De Mouy assassinated by Maurevel, has been with me at the risk of his life, to prove to me that I was in captivity."

"Ah, indeed, and what reply did you make?"

"My brother, you know how tenderly I love Charles, who saved my life; and that the queen-mother has been a mother to me. I have, therefore, refused all the offers he made me."

"And what were these offers?"

"The Huguenots wished to reconstitute the throne of Navarre; and as in reality this throne belonged to me by inheritance, they offered it to me."

"Yes, and M. de Mouy, instead of the adhesion he had entreated, received your refusal?"—"Most decidedly; but since—" continued Henry.

"You have repented, my brother?" interrupted D'Alencon.

"No; but I have found that M. de Mouy, enraged at my refusal, has cast his eyes in another direction."

"Whither?" asked Francois, quickly.

"I do not know; on the Prince de Conde, perchance."

"Very probably," was the reply.

"I have, however, a certain means of ascertaining the chief he has selected."

Francois became very pale.

"But," continued Henry, "the Huguenots are divided among themselves; and De Mouy, brave and loyal as he is, represents but one half the party. Now, the other half, which is not to be despised, has not lost all hope of seeing on the throne that Henry of Navarre, who, after having hesitated in the first instance, may have reflected afterward."

"Do you think so?"

"I have daily proofs of this. The troop that joined us at the hunt—did you remark the men who composed it?"

"Yes; they were converted gentlemen."

"The chief of this troop, who made me a sign—did you recognize him?"

"Yes; it was the Vicomte de Turenne."

"Did you understand what they wished?"

"Yes; they proposed to you to fly."

"Then," said Henry, "it is evident that there is a second party with different views from M. de Mouy, and that a very powerful one; so that, in order to succeed, it is requisite to unite the two parties, Turenne and De Mouy. The conspiracy strengthens—troops are ready—they but await the signal—and between my two resolutions I waver; and have, therefore, come to submit them to you as a friend."

"Say rather as a brother!"

"First, let me expose the state of my mind, my dear Francois: no desire, no ambition, no capacity. I am a good sort of country gentleman—poor, indolent, and timid: the idea of conspirator presents to me a chance of disgrace, badly compensated by even the assured perspective of a crown."

"Ah, my brother!" said Francois, "you are wrong; nothing can be more pitiable than the position of a prince whose fortune is limited by a landmark, or by some individual in the career of honor. I cannot, therefore, credit what you say."

"Yet I speak only the truth, my brother," was Henry's reply; "and if I could believe that I had a real friend, I would resign in his favor all the power which the party attached to me would confer; but," he added with a sigh, "I have not one."

"Perhaps you are mistaken."

"No, ventre-saint-gris!" cried Henry. "Except yourself, brother, I see no one who is attached to me; and then, I must inform my brother the king of all that is going on. I will name no person—I will not mention country, nor date; but I will prevent the catastrophe."

"Grand Dieu!" exclaimed D'Alencon, who could not repress his alarm; "what are you saying? You, the sole hope of the party since the admiral's death; you, a converted Huguenot—scare converted, as it would seem—would you raise the knife against your brothers? Henry, Henry, in doing that you will hand over to a second Saint Bartholomew all the Calvinists of the kingdom! Do you know that Catherine only awaits such an opportunity to exterminate all the survivors?"

And the trembling duke, his face marked with red and livid spots, pressed Henry's hand, in his eagerness to make him promise to renounce a resolution which must destroy him.

"What!" said Henry, with an air of much surprise, "do you think, Francois, that so many misfortunes must then occur? Yet it seems to me that, with the king's guarantee, I could save the imprudent partisans."

"The guarantee of King Charles the Ninth, Henry? Did not the admiral have it? Teligny? yourself? Ah, Henry! I tell you, if you do this, you destroy them all; not only them, but also all directly or indirectly connected with them."

Henry appeared to reflect for a moment:

"If," said he, "I were an important prince at court, I should act otherwise; in your place, for instance, Francois, a son of France, and probable heir to the throne."

Francois shook his head skeptically, and said, "What would you do in my place?"

"In your place, my brother," replied Henry, "I should put myself at the head of this movement. My name and credit would answer to my conscience for the life of the seditious; and I would derive from it something useful for myself, in the first instance, and then for the king; and this from an enterprise which otherwise may terminate in great mischief for France."

D'Alencon listened to these words with a joy which expanded all the muscles of his face, and replied:

"Do you think this practicable, and will avoid all those evils which you foresee?"

"I do," said Henry. "The Huguenots like you: your modest exterior, your situation, elevated and interesting at the same time, and the kindness you have always evinced to those of the Reformed faith, induce them to serve you."

"But," said D'Alencon, "there is a schism in the party: will those who are for you be for me?"

"I will undertake to conciliate them, on two grounds."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, through the confidence which the chiefs have in me; then from their fear when your highness, knowing their names—But without further persuasion, my brother, take up this matter. Reign in Navarre; and so that you keep for me a place at your table and a good forest for hunting, I shall be perfectly happy."

"Reign in Navarre!" said the duke; "but if—"

"If the Duke d'Anjou is named king of Poland?—you would say."

Francois cast a look of terror on Henry.

"If the Duke d'Anjou is nominated king of Poland, and our brother Charles (whom God preserve!) should die, it is but two hundred leagues from Pau to Paris, while it is four hundred from Paris

to Cracow; and you would be here to claim the inheritance at the moment when the king of Poland would only have learned of its being vacated. Then, if you are satisfied with me, Francois, you may give me this kingdom of Navarre, which will then be only one of the offshoots of your crown. Under these circumstances I would accept it. The worst that can arrive is, to remain king there, and live *en famille* with me and my wife; while here, what are you?—a poor, persecuted prince, a poor third son of the king, a slave of two elder brothers, whom a caprice may send to the Bastille."

"Yes, yes," said Francois: "I feel all this so well, that I cannot understand how you renounce all the hopes that you propose for me."

"There are," said Henry, with a smile, "burdens too heavy for certain hands. I shall not try to lift this one."

"Then, Henry, you really renounce?"

"I said so to De Mouy, and I repeat it to you."

"But in such cases, brother," said D'Alencon, "men do not *say*, they prove."

"I will prove it this evening," was the reply; "at nine o'clock, the list of the chiefs and the plan of the enterprise shall be in your hands."

Francois took Henry's hand and pressed it with fervor.

At the same moment, Catherine entered the apartment, and, as usual, without being announced.

"Together," she said, with a smile, "like two loving brothers."

"I hope so, madame," replied Henry, with the utmost composure, while the Duke d'Alencon turned pale with agony.

The queen-mother then took from her gypsire a magnificent jewel, and said to Francois (from whom Henry had receded several paces), "This clasp comes from Florence, and I give it you to fasten your sword;" then she added, in a low voice: "If you should hear any noise this evening in the apartment of your good brother Henry, do not heed it."

Francois grasped his mother's hand, and said: "Will you allow me to show him the handsome present you have just made me?"

"Do still better; give it to him in your own and my name, for I had ordered a second for that purpose."

"Do you hear, Henry?" said Francois; "my good mother brings me this jewel, and redoubles its value by allowing me to offer it to you." Henry went into raptures at the beauty of the jewel, and was profuse in his thanks.

"My son," said Catherine, "I do not feel well, and am going to bed. Your brother Charles is much shaken by his fall, and wishes to do the same thing. We shall not, therefore, all sup together. —Ah, Henry! I forgot to compliment you on your courage and skill: you have saved your king and brother, and you must be recompensed for such high service."

"I am recompensed already," replied Henry, with a bow.

"By the feeling that you have done your duty?" was Catherine's reply; "but that is not enough for Charles and myself, and we must devise some means of requiting our obligations toward you."

"All that may come from you and my good brother must be welcome, madame," was Henry's reply; and, bowing, he left the apartment.

"Ah, my worthy brother Francois!" thought Henry, as he went out; "now I am sure not to go away alone; and the conspiracy, which had a heart, has now found a head, and what is still better, this head is responsible to me for my own: only let us be on our guard. Catherine has made me a present — Catherine promises me a recompense; there is some devilry or other, then, brewing, and I will have a conversation this evening with Marguerite."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GRATITUDE OF KING CHARLES THE NINTH.

MAUREVEL had remained for a portion of the day in the king's armory; and when Catherine saw the moment approach of the return from the chase, she had desired him and his satellites to pass into her oratory.

Charles IX., informed by his nurse, on his arrival, who the man was, and remembering the order his mother had extracted from him in the morning, understood everything.

"Ah, ah!" he murmured, "the time is ill-chosen, on the very day on which he has saved my life."

And he was about to go to his mother, but suddenly changed his intention.

"Mordieu!" he exclaimed, "if I speak to her of it, what a discussion will ensue! We had better act each for one's self.—Nurse," he continued, "shut all the doors, and inform the Queen Elizabeth" (Charles IX. was married to Elizabeth of Austria, daughter of Maximilian), "that, being rather unwell from my fall, I shall sleep in my own apartment to-night."

The nurse obeyed; and as the hour for his plan had not arrived, Charles began to write verses. It was the occupation in which he most delighted; and thus nine o'clock struck, when Charles thought it was only seven. He counted the strokes one after the other, and at the last he rose: "Nom d'un diable!" he exclaimed, "it is precisely the time."

Taking his cloak and hat, he went out by a secret door which he had made in the paneling, and of the existence of which Catherine herself was ignorant.

Charles went straight to Henry's apartment. Henry had only gone thither to change his dress, when he left the Duke d'Alencon, and had then left it instantly.

"He must have gone to sup with Marguerite," said the king to himself; "he was on the best possible terms with her; at least, it appeared so to me;" and he went toward Marguerite's apartment.

Marguerite had invited to her rooms the Duchesse de Nevers, Coconnas and La Mole, and they were enjoying a repast of pastry and sweetmeats.

Charles knocked at the door; Gillonne went to open it, and was so frightened at the sight of the king that she could scarcely curtsey to him; and instead of running to inform her mistress of the august visit which was paid her, she allowed Charles to pass her without any other signal than the cry she had uttered.

The king crossed the antechamber, and, guided by the shouts of laughter, advanced toward the dining-room.

"Poor Harry!" he ejaculated, "he is making merry, quite unconscious of his danger."

"'Tis I!" he said aloud, and raising the tapestry, presented his face, which was all smiling.

Marguerite uttered a terrible cry. All joyous as was the king's face, it produced on her the effect of a Medusa's head. She had recognized Charles.

The two men had their backs turned to the king.

"His majesty!" she exclaimed, in a tone of affright, and she rose from her seat.

Coconnas, while the three others felt quite bewildered, was the only one who preserved his presence of mind. He also rose, but with well-contrived awkwardness, upset the table, with its glass, plates, and wax lights; and in a moment there was complete darkness and the silence of death.

"Steal off!" said Coconnas to La Mole; "quick—quick, and cleverly."

La Mole did not wait for a second hint, but feeling along the wall with his hands, groped his way into the bedchamber, that he might hide in the closet he knew so well.

But as he entered the sleeping-room, he came in contact with a man who entered by the secret passage.

"What can all this mean?" said Charles, in the dark, with a voice that was beginning to sound very impatiently; "am I an intruder, that on my appearance such a scene of confusion takes place. Harry—Harry! where are you?—answer me!"

"We are saved!" whispered Marguerite, taking a hand which she supposed to be that of Coconnas; "the king thinks that my husband is one of the guests."

"And he shall think so still, madame, be assured," said Henry himself to the queen, in the same tone.

"Grand Dieu!" exclaimed Marguerite, suddenly quitting her grasp of the hand she held.

"Hush!" said Henry.

"In the name of ten thousand devils! what are you all whispering for?" cried Charles. "Henry, answer—where are you?"

"I am here, sire," said the voice of the king of Navarre.

"The devil!" said Coconnas; "the plot thickens."

"And we are doubly lost," added the Duchesse de Nevers.

Coconnas, brave even to rashness, had reflected that at last the candles must be lighted, and thinking the sooner the better, left the hand of the Duchesse de Nevers, which he had hitherto held in his own, picked up a taper, and going to the stove, lighted it.

The room was thus again illuminated, and Charles cast an inquiring glance around.

Henry was close to his wife; the Duchesse de Nevers was alone in a corner; and Coconnas, standing in the middle of the chamber with his candle in his hand, lighted up the whole scene.

"Excuse us, brother," said Marguerite; "we did not expect you."

"And so your majesty, as you may see, has frightened us not a little," said Henriette.

"For my part," added Henry, who at once comprehended the whole, "I was so startled that I upset the table."

Coconnas gave the king of Navarre a look which implied:

"I like that!—here's a husband who knows what he's about!".

"What a complete upset!" said Charles. "Harry, your supper is regularly spoiled; so come with me, and you shall finish it elsewhere. I mean to carry you off this evening."

"What, sire!" said Henry; "your majesty will do me that honor?"

"Yes, my majesty will do you the honor to take you from the Louvre. Lend him to me, Marguerite, and I will bring him back again to-morrow morning."

"Ah, brother," replied Marguerite, "you have no need of my permission for that; you are master here, as everywhere else."

"Sire," said Henry, "I will just go for another cloak, and return immediately."

"There's no occasion; the one you have on is quite good enough."

"But, sire—" said the Béarnais.

"I tell you not to return to your apartments, *mille noms d'un diable!* don't you hear what I say? Come along!"

"Yes—yes, go!" said Marguerite, pressing her husband's arm, for a singular look of Charles's had convinced her that something remarkable was going on.

"I am ready, sire," said Henry.

But Charles was looking very steadfastly at Coconnas, who continued his office of torch-bearer by lighting the other candles.

"Who is this gentleman?" he inquired of Henry, still gazing on the Piedmontese; "is it M. de la Mole?"

"Who has mentioned M. de la Mole to him?" thought Marguerite.

"No, sire," replied Henry; "M. de la Mole is not here, and I regret it the more, as I cannot have the honor of presenting him to your majesty as well as his friend, M. de Coconnas: they are inseparables, and are both in the suite of M. d'Alencon."

"Ah! ah! of our famous marksman!" said Charles: then frowning, he added, "Is not M. de la Mole a Huguenot?"

"Converted, sire," said Henry; "and I answer for him as for myself."

"When you answer for any one, Harry, after what you have done to-day, I have no right to doubt you. But no matter. I should have liked to see M. de la Mole, but some other time will do;" and then, looking again around the chamber, Charles kissed Marguerite, and took away the king of Navarre, holding him by the arm.

At the gate of the Louvre, Henry stopped to speak to some one.

"Come, come along quickly, Harry," said Charles. "When I tell you the air of the Louvre is not good for you this evening, why the devil don't you believe me?"

"Ventre-saint-gris!" murmured Henry, "and De Mouy will be all alone in my room; if the air is not good for me, it must be worse for him."

They crossed the drawbridge, and the king giving a peculiar whistle, four gentlemen who were waiting in the Rue de Beauvais joined them, and they all advanced into the city.

The clock struck ten.

"Well!" said Marguerite, when the king and Henry had gone, "let us sit down again to table."

"No, ma foi!" said the duchess; "I am too much frightened. The little house in the Rue Cloche-Percée forever! No one can enter there without laying a regular siege, and our brave friends could use their swords."

Coconnas went to the cabinet.

"Well!" said a voice in the darkness, "what has happened?"

"Eh, mordi! we are now at the dessert."

"And the king of Navarre?"

"Has seen nothing."

"And King Charles?"

"Ah! the king has taken off the husband."——"No, really!"

"Yes, and the ladies have a pilgrimage to make toward the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, and we must guard the pilgrims."

"Impossible! you know that—"

"Why impossible?"

"Why, are we not in the service of his royal highness?"

The two friends represented their position to their fair friends, and Madame de Nevers said:

"Well, then, we will go without you."

The two young men made their bows, and proceeded to the Duke d'Alencon, who seemed to be awaiting them.

"You are rather late, gentlemen," was his remark.

"Scarcely ten o'clock, monseigneur," replied Coconnas.

The duke looked at his watch.

"True, but yet everybody in the Louvre is in bed."

"Monseigneur," said Coconnas, "your highness, no doubt, will go to bed, or write—"

"No, gentlemen, I can dispense with your services until to-morrow morning."

The two young men ran upstairs as speedily as possible, took their cloaks and night-swords, and hastening out of the Louvre, overtook the two ladies at the corner of the Rue du Coq-Saint-Honoré.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES.

As the duke said, everything was silent at the Louvre.

Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had gone to the Rue Cloche-Percée; Coconnas and La Mole had followed them; the king and Henry were roving about in the city; the Duke d'Alencon was anxiously watching the accomplishment of the events his mother had alluded to, and Catherine was in bed, listening to Madame de Sauve, who read to her certain Italian tales, at which the worthy queen laughed heartily.

"Let me know," said Catherine, "if my daughter, the queen of Navarre, is in her apartments, and if she is, beg her to come and keep me company."

The page to whom this order was addressed left the room, and soon returned, accompanied by Gillonne.

"I sent for the queen," said Catherine, "not for her attendant."

"Madame," replied Gillonne, "I thought it my duty to come myself, to inform your majesty that the queen of Navarre is gone out with the Duchesse de Nevers."

"Out at this hour!" said Catherine, frowning; "where is she gone?"

"To a meeting of alchemists, at the Hotel de Guise, in the apartments of Madame de Nevers."

"And when will she return?"

"The meeting will not break up until very late," replied Gillonne, "so that it is probable her majesty will sleep at the Hotel de Guise."

"She is very happy," murmured Catherine; "she has friends, and is a queen; she wears a crown, and is called your majesty, and she has no subjects."

Gillonne made her curtsey, and left the room.

"Go on, Charlotte," said the queen.

Madame de Sauve obeyed.

In ten minutes Catherine stopped her.

"Oh, by the way," said she, "dismiss the guards in the gallery."

This was the signal agreed upon with Maurevel.

The order was executed, and Madame de Sauve continued.

She had read for a quarter of an hour, when a long and piercing cry was heard, that made the hair of all in the chamber stand on end.

A pistol-shot followed.

"Well," said Catherine, "why do you not go on reading?"

"Madame," replied Charlotte, turning deadly pale; "did not your majesty hear?"

"What?" asked Catherine.

"That cry!"

"And that pistol-shot?" added the captain of the guards.

"A cry and a pistol-shot!" said Catherine, "I heard them not; besides, a cry and a pistol-shot are nothing so very extraordinary at the Louvre. Read on, Carlotta."

"But listen, madame," said Madame de Sauve, while M. de Nancey stood grasping his sword-hilt, not daring to leave the apartment without the queen's permission, "I hear struggling, imprecations—"

"Shall I go and see, madame?" asked De Nancey.

"No, sir," returned Catherine. "Who will be here to protect me in case of danger? It is only some drunken Swiss quarreling."

The tranquillity of the queen contrasted so strangely with the alarm of every one else, that Madame de Sauve, timid as she was, fixed her eyes inquiringly on her.

"But, madame," said she, "it is as if they were killing some one."

"Whom do you think they are killing?"

"The king of Navarre, madame; for the noise comes from his apartments."

"The fool!" murmured the queen, whose lips, spite of the control she had over herself, were strangely agitated, for she was muttering a prayer; "the fool! she sees her king of Navarre everywhere."

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" said Madame de Sauve, sinking into her chair.

"It is over," said Catherine. "Captain," continued she, addressing M. de Nancey, "I hope that to-morrow you will inquire into this, and punish the culprits severely. Continue, Carlotta."

And Catherine sank back on her pillow in a state that seemed near akin to fainting, for her attendants remarked large drops of perspiration on her face.

Madame de Sauve obeyed, but her eyes and her voice alone were engaged. She fancied she saw him most dear to her, surrounded by deadly perils, and after a mental struggle of some minutes, her voice failed her, the book fell from her hands, and she fainted.

Suddenly a still more violent noise than before was heard, a hasty step shook the corridor, two more pistol-shots made the window-panes shake. Catherine, astonished at this renewal of the strife, rose; she was deadly pale, her eyes were dilated, and at the moment De Nancey was about to rush from the apartment, she seized his arm, saying:

"Let every one stay here; I will go myself and see what is the matter."

Thus it was: De Mouy had received that morning, from the hands of Orthon, the key of Henry's chamber; in the key he remarked a small roll of paper, which he took out and found it to contain the password at the Louvre for the night.

Orthon had, moreover, given him the king's directions to be at the Louvre at ten o'clock.

At half-past nine, De Mouy put on his armor, buttoned a silken doublet on it, buckled over his sword, placed his pistols in his belt, and covered all with the famous cherry mantle.

We have seen how Henry thought fit to pay Marguerite a visit before entering his own apartments, and how he arrived by the secret passage just in time to run against La Mole in Marguerite's chamber, and to take his place in the supper-room. Precisely at this moment, De Mouy passed the wicket of the Louvre, and, thanks to the password and the cherry mantle, entered the palace without obstacle.

He went straight to the king of Navarre's apartments, imitating, as well as he could, La Mole's walk and manner.

He found Orthon waiting for him in the antechamber.

"Sirè de Mouy," said the mountaineer, "the king has gone out, but he has ordered me to conduct you to his chamber, where you are to wait; should he not come until late, he desires you will lie down on his bed."

De Mouy entered, without asking further explanation.

In order to fill up the time, De Mouy took pen and paper, and approaching an excellent map of France that hung on the wall, set himself to count the stages from Paris to Pau.

This did not occupy him long, and when he had finished he was at a loss what to do.

He walked up and down the room a few times, yawned, and then, profiting by Henry's invitation, and by the familiarity that then existed between princes and their gentlemen, placed his pistols and the lamp on the table, laid his drawn sword by his side, and secure against surprise, for an attendant was watching in the outer chamber, soon slept soundly.

It was then that six men, sword and dagger in hand, glided noiselessly along the corridor that communicated with Henry's apartments.

One of these men walked in front; besides his sword and dagger, he had pistols attached to his belt by silver hooks. This man was Maurevel. Arrived at Henry's door, he stopped.

"Are you quite sure all the sentinels are gone?" asked he.

"There is not one left," replied his lieutenant.

"Good," said Maurevel; "now let us see whether he we come for is here."

"Poor devil of a king!" said one of the men; "it was written on high he should not escape."

"And here also," said Maurevel, pointing to the order in his girdle.

Maurevel placed the key Catherine had given him in the lock, and leaving two men at the door, passed with the others into the antechamber.

"Ah," said he, hearing, even from that distance, the loud breathing of the sleeper; "it seems we have got him."

Orthon, thinking it was his master, advanced and found himself in the presence of five armed men. At the sight of their sinister faces, and more particularly at that of Maurevel, he recoiled, and planted himself before the second door.

"Who are you?" said Orthon; "and what do you want?"

"In the king's name," said Maurevel, "where is your master?"

"He is absent."

"'Tis false!" replied Maurevel. "Stand back!"

Orthon seized the handle of the door.

"You shall not enter!" cried he.

At a sign from Maurevel, the four men grasped the faithful page, tore him from his hold, and as he was about to cry out, Maurevel placed his hand on his mouth. Orthon bit the assassin furiously, who uttered a suppressed cry, and struck him on the head with the pommel of his sword. Orthon fell, crying, "Treason! treason!"

His voice failed him, and he fainted.

The assassins passed over his body; two stationed themselves at the second door, and the three others, led by Maurevel, entered the bed-chamber.

By the light of the lamp they saw the bed: the curtains were closed. "Oh," said the lieutenant, "he snores no longer!"

"Now then—upon him!" replied Maurevel.

At this voice, a hoarse cry, more like the roar of a lion than the voice of a human being, was heard, the curtains were violently drawn back, and a man in a cuirass and steel cap appeared sitting on the bed, a pistol in each hand, and his drawn sword on his knees. At this sight, Maurevel's hair stood on end; he turned deadly pale, and recoiled as if he had seen a specter.

Suddenly, the armed figure rose and advanced toward Maurevel, as he retreated, so that it was he who seemed to fly, and De Mouy who seemed to pursue.

"Ah, scoundrel!" said De Mouy; "you are come to murder me, as you murdered my father!"

The two guards who were with Maurevel alone heard these terrible words; but as they were uttered, one of De

Mouy's pistols was leveled at Maurevel's head. The ruffian sank on his knees at the instant De Mouy pulled the trigger, and one of the guards, whom he uncovered by this movement, fell with a bullet in his heart; Maurevel instantly fired in return, but the ball glanced off De Mouy's cuirass.

Then, measuring the distance and calculating his spring, De Mouy, with a back stroke of his large sword, cleft the skull of the second guard, and turning to Maurevel, crossed weapons with him.

The combat was terrible, but brief: at the fourth pass, Maurevel felt De Mouy's sword in his throat; he uttered a low groan, and fell, upsetting the lamp, which was extinguished in the fall.

Agile and powerful as one of Homer's heroes, De Mouy sprang boldly forward, favored by the obscurity, into the antechamber, felled one of the guards to the earth, sent the other staggering from him, passed like lightning between the two at the outer door, escaped two pistol-shots fired at him, the balls of which grazed the corridor, and was then safe, for besides the sword with which he dealt such fearful blows he had a loaded pistol.

He hesitated an instant whether he should enter D'Alencon's apartments, the door of which seemed ajar, or escape from the Louvre: resolving upon the latter course, he sprang down the stairs, arrived at the wicket, pronounced the password, adding: "Go upstairs! they are killing on the king's account."

And availing himself of the stupefaction produced by the report of the pistols and his own words, he disappeared in the Rue du Coq, without having received a scratch.

It was at this moment that Catherine stopped M. de Nancey, saying:

"Stay here; I will go myself and see what is the matter."

Then, taking a lamp, and passing her naked feet into slippers, Catherine advanced, pale as a specter, along the corridor, full of smoke, toward Henry's apartments.

All was silent.

She arrived at the door, entered, and found Orthon senseless on the threshhold.

"Oh," said she, "here is the servant; we shall soon find the master:" and she approached the second door.

There her foot struck against a corpse: she turned the lamp upon it; it was the guard whose skull had been cleft · he was quite dead. A little further lay the lieutenant, with the death-rattle in his throat.

Beside the bed was a man, who, pale as death, was bleeding fast from a double wound in his throat, and who, clenching his hands convulsively, strove to raise himself.

It was Maurevel.

Catherine shuddered; she saw the bed deserted; she eagerly looked around the room, and in vain sought among the three corpses for the one she so earnestly desired to behold.

Maurevel knew Catherine, and stretched out his hand toward her with a desperate movement.

"Where is he?" said she. "Have you let him escape?"

Maurevel strove to speak, but a bloody foam covered his lips, and he could only feebly shake his head.

"Speak!" cried the queen; "speak, if it be but one word!"

Maurevel pointed to his wound, and after a desperate effort to utter something, fainted.

She looked around her: there were none but the dead and the dying there: blood flowed in every direction, and silence reigned in the chamber. She spoke again to Maurevel, but in vain; a paper was in his girdle—it was the order for Henry's arrest; Catherine seized it, and concealed it beneath her robe.

At this instant she heard a slight noise behind her, and turning round, she perceived D'Alencon, who had been drawn thither by the noise.

"You here, Francois?" said she.

"Yes, madame. For God's sake, what does this mean?"

"Retire to your apartments; you will know soon enough."

D'Alencon, however, was not so ignorant of what had passed as Catherine imagined. Seeing men enter the king of Navarre's apartments, he guessed what was to happen, and was secretly rejoiced at having so dangerous an enemy disposed of by a hand more powerful than his own.

Soon the noise of firearms and the steps of a fugitive attracted his attention, and he saw Cherry Mantle disappear.

"De Mouy!" cried he; "De Mouy with my brother-in-law, or can it be La Mole?"

He began to feel alarmed.

Wishing to assure himself, he ascended to his apartment; no one was there, but the cherry-colored mantle was hanging against the wall. It was, then, De Mouy. Pale as death, and trembling lest De Mouy had been taken prisoner, and betrayed the secrets of the conspiracy, he rushed to the wicket, where he was informed De Mouy had passed, saying that some one was being killed on the king's account.

"He was mistaken," muttered D'Alencon; "it is on the queen-mother's account."

And returning to the scene of combat, he found Catherine prowling like a hyena among the dead.

Catherine, in despair at the failure of this new attempt, called De Nancey, had the bodies removed, and Maurevel conveyed to his own house, and forbade them to wake the king.

"Oh," murmured she, as she entered her apartment, her head sunk on her bosom; "he has again escaped—the hand of God protects him. He will reign—he will reign!"

Then, as she opened her door, she assumed a smile.

"Oh, madame, what was the matter?" demanded every one except Madame de Sauve, who was too frightened to ask any questions.

"Oh, nothing," replied the queen; "only a noise; nothing more."

"But," cried Madame de Sauve, suddenly, "every step your majesty takes leaves a trace of blood on the carpet!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TWO KINGS.

CHARLES IX. walked arm in arm with Henry, followed by his four gentlemen, and preceded by two torch-bearers.

"When I quit the Louvre," said the poor king, "I experience a pleasure like that I feel when I enter a fine forest—I breathe, I live, I am free!"

Henry smiled.

"Your majesty would be happy in my mountains in Béarn, then?" was his reply.

"Yes, and I can understand how desirous you are to return there; but if the desire comes very strong upon you, Harry," added Charles, laughing, "be careful, for my mother Catherine is so very fond of you that she really cannot do without you."

The two kings, followed by their escort, had reached the Hotel de Conde, when they observed two men, wrapped in long cloaks, come forth from a private door, which one of them closed carefully.

"Oh, oh!" said the king to Henry, "this deserves our attention. You, Harry, are sure of your wife" (Charles smiled as he said this), "but your cousin De Conde is not so sure of his; or if he is sure, devil fetch me! but he is very wrong."

"But how do you know, sire, that it is Madame de Conde these gentlemen have come to visit?"

"A presentiment. They have seen us, and try to avoid notice; and then the peculiar cut of one of their mantles. Pardieu! it would be strange!"

"What?"

"Nothing, only an idea; but let us advance toward them."

And he went toward the two men, who, thus seeing that they must be accosted, made several steps in a contrary direction.

"Hola! messieurs," said the king; "stop!"

"Do you address us?" said a voice, which made Charles and his companion start.

"Ah, Harry!" said Charles, "do you recognize that voice now?"

"Sire," replied Henry, "if your brother, the Duke d'Anjou, were not at Rochelle, I should swear it was he who just spoke."

"Well, then," said Charles, "he is not at Rochelle."

"But who is with him?"

"A man whose figure can hardly be mistaken. Halo! I say," continued the king, "did you not hear me?"

"Are you the watch to apprehend us?" asked the taller of the two men, thrusting forth his hand from the folds of his mantle.

"Assume that we are the watch," said the king, "and stand when you are desired."

Then, whispering Henry, he added, "Now you will see the volcano spit forth flames."

"There are eight of you," replied the taller of the two men, showing not only his arm but his face; "but were you a hundred, I bid you keep your distance."

"Ah, ah! the Duke de Guise!" said Henry.

"Ah! our cousin of Lorraine," said the king; "it is you, is it? How fortunate!"

"The king!" exclaimed the duke.

As to the other personage, he wrapped himself up still closer in his mantle, and remained motionless, after having first uncovered his head respectfully.

"Sire," said the Duke de Guise, "I have just been paying a visit to my sister-in-law, Madame de Conde."

"Yes, and have brought one of your gentlemen with you. Pray, who is he?"

"Sire," replied the duke, "your majesty does not know him."

"Then we will make his acquaintance now," said the king; and going toward him, he desired the two men to approach with their flambeaux.

"Pardon, my brother," said the Duke d'Anjou, opening his mantle, and bowing with ill-concealed vexation.

"Ah, ah, Henry! What, is it you? But no, it cannot be possible. I am deceived. My brother of Anjou would never have gone to see any person without first coming to see me. He is not ignorant that for princes of the blood there is only one entrance in Paris, and that is by the gate of the Louvre."

"Pardon me, sire," said the Duke d'Anjou. "I entreat your majesty to forgive this breach of etiquette."

"Of course," replied the king, in a jeering tone; "and what were you doing, brother, at the Hotel de Conde?"

"Why," said the king of Navarre, with his peculiar air, "what your majesty alluded to but just now;" and he laughed loudly.

"And wherefore," asked the Duke de Guise, with hauteur, for, like the rest of the world, he behaved very rudely to the poor king of Navarre, "should I not visit my sister-in-law? Does not the Duke d'Alencon visit his?"

Henry's cheek turned red.

"What sister-in-law?" said Charles; "I do not know of any other he has than the Queen Elizabeth."

"Your pardon, sire; it was his sister I should have said—Madame Marguerite, whom we saw as we came hither half-an-hour since, in her litter, accompanied by two sparks, one on each side."

"Really?" said Charles; "what do you say to that, Henry?"

"That the queen of Navarre is free to go where she pleases; but I doubt her having quitted the Louvre."

"And I am sure of it," said the Duke de Guise.

"And I also," said the Duke d'Anjou; "and the litter stopped in the Rue Cloche-Percée."

"Your sister-in-law, then — not this one, but the other," and he pointed his finger in the direction of the Hotel de Guise, "must be also of the party, for we left them together, and they are, as you know, inseparables."

"I do not understand what your majesty implies," replied the Duke de Guise.

"Now to me," observed the king, "nothing can be more clear; and that is why there was a spark on each side of the litter."

"Well," said the duke, "if there be any wrong on the part of the queen and of my sister-in-law, let us call on the justice of the king to put an end to it."

"Eh, par Dieu!" said Henry, "let us have done with Mesdames de Conde and de Nevers. The king has no uneasiness about his sister; I have none for my wife."

"No, no," interposed Charles; "I will have the affair cleared up; but let us manage it ourselves. The litter, you say, cousin, stopped in the Rue Cloche-Percée?"

"Yes, sire."

"You know the spot?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well, then, let us go thither; and if it be necessary to burn down the house to know who is in it, why, we will do so."

It was with this feeling, very discouraging for those concerned, that the four principal princes of the Christian world proceeded toward the Rue Saint Antoine.

When they reached the Rue Cloche-Percée, Charles, who wished to confine the thing to his family, dismissed his attendants, desiring them to be near the Bastille at six o'clock in the morning, with two horses.

On reaching the house, they knocked, and tried to gain admittance, which the German porter decidedly and doggedly refused. Seeing that they could not succeed so, the Duke de Guise, pretending to go away, went to the corner of the Rue Saint Antoine, and there picked up one of those stones such as Ajax, Telamon, and Diomede upheaved three thousand years before, and dashed it with violence against the door, which flew open with the concussion, knocking down the German, who fell heavily, and with a loud cry, that aroused the garrison, which else ran a great risk of being surprised.

At this noise, La Mole, Coconnas, Marguerite, and Henriette were aroused. They blew out all the lights instantly, and opening the windows, went out into the balcony, when, seeing four men in the darkness, they began to shower down upon them all the projectiles within reach, and make a noise by striking the stone walls with the flat of their swords. Charles, the most eager of the assailants, received a silver ewer on his shoulder, the Duke d'Anjou a basin containing a jelly of oranges and cinnamon, and th Duke de Guise a haunch of venison.

Henry received nothing; he was quietl speaking to the porter, whom M. de Guis had tied to the door, and who replied b his eternal:

"Ich verstehe nicht."

The women ably backed the besiege army, and handed projectiles to them which fell like hail.

"By the devil's death!" cried Charles as he received on his head a stool whic knocked his hat over his eyes and on t his nose, "if they do not open this mo ment, I'll hang them all."

"My brother!" said Marguerite to L Mole, in a low voice.

"The king!" said he to Henriette.

"The king! the king!" said she t Coconnas, who was drawing a large ches to the window, intending it especially fo the Duke de Guise, whom, without know ing him, he had picked out as his peculia antagonist; "the king, I tell you!"

Coconnas let go the chest with an ai of amazement.

"The king?" said he.

"Yes, the king!"

"Then sound a retreat."

"Well, be it so. Marguerite and L Mole are off already."

"Which way?"

"Come this way, I tell you!" an taking him by the hand, Henriette le Coconnas by the secret door which led t the adjoining house, and having closed i after them, they all four fled by the wa that led to the Rue Tizon.

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, "I think th garrison surrenders. Cousin," he con tinued, "take up the stone again, an serve the inner door as you have done th outer."

The duke burst the other door in wit his foot.

"The torches! the torches!" said th king, and the lackeys having relighte them, came forward, and the king tak ing one, handed the other to the Duk d'Anjou.

The Duke de Guise went first, sword i hand; Henry brought up the rear.

They reached the first story, and in th

dining-room found the relics of supper, with candelabra upset, furniture thrown over, and all that was not of metal destroyed.

They went into the salon, but there was no better clew to the late truants there than in the other room.

"There must be another way of egress," observed the king.

"Most probably," replied D'Anjou.

They searched on all sides, but found no door.

"Where is the porter?" inquired the king.

"I fastened him to the door," replied the Duke de Guise.

Henry looked out of the window, and observed:

"He is there no longer."

"Devil's death!" said the king, "we shall learn nothing now."

"And really," added Henry, "you see plainly, sire, that nothing proves that my wife and the Duke de Guise's sister-in-law have been in this house; and thus the best thing we can do—"

"Is," said Charles, "for me to foment my bruise, D'Anjou to wipe away the marks of the orange-jam, and Guise to rub the grease from off his ruff."

And then they all went away, without so much as closing the door after them.

When they reached the Rue Saint Antoine, the king said to M. d'Anjou and the Duke de Guise:

"Which way are you going, gentlemen?"

"Sire, we are going to Nantouillet's, who expects my cousin of Lorraine and myself to supper. Will your majesty deign to accompany us?"

"No, I thank you; our way lies in an opposite direction. Will you have one of my torch-bearers?"

"No, I thank you, sire," was D'Anjou's reply.

"Good! He is afraid I should watch him," whispered Charles in Henry's ear. Then, taking him by the arm, he said:

"Come, Harry, I will find you a supper to-night."

"Then we are not going back to the Louvre?" was Henry's response.

"No, I tell you, you threefold thickhead! Come with me when I tell you—come, come!"

And he conducted Henry by the Rue Geoffroy-Lasnier.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARIE TOUCHET.

THEY reached the Rue de la Mortellerie, and stopped before a small lone house in the middle of a garden, inclosed by high walls. Charles took a key from his pocket, and opened the door; and then, desiring Henry and the torch-bearer to enter, he closed the door after him. One small window only was lighted, to which Charles, with a smile, pointed Henry's attention, saying:

"Harry, I told you, that when I left the Louvre I quitted hell, and when I come here I enter paradise."

"And who is the angel that guards the entrance to your Eden, sire?"

"You will see," replied Charles IX.; and making a sign to Henry to follow him without noise, he pushed open a first door, then a second, and paused on the threshold.

"Look!" he said.

Henry did so, and remained with his eyes fixed on as charming a picture as he ever saw. It was a female of eighteen or nineteen years of age, reposing at the foot of a bed, on which was a sleeping infant, whose two feet she held in her hands, pressing them to her lips, while her long chestnut hair fell down over them like waves of gold.

It was a picture of Albano's representing the Virgin and the infant Jesus.

"Oh, sire," said the king of Navarre, "who is this charming creature?"

"The angel of my paradise, Harry; the only being who loves me for myself."

Henry smiled.

"Yes," said Charles, "for myself; for she loved me before she knew I was the king."

"Well, and since—"

"Well, and since," said Charles, with a sigh, which proved that this glittering royalty was sometimes a burden to him;

"since she knew it, she still loves me. Watch!"

The king approached her gently, and on the lovely cheek of the young female impressed a kiss as light as that of the bee on a lily, yet it awoke her.

"Charles!" she murmured, opening her eyes.

"You see," said the king, "she calls me Charles: the queen says sire."

"Oh," exclaimed the young girl, "you are not alone!"

"No, dearest Marie, I have brought you another king, happier than myself, for he has no crown: more unhappy than me, for he has no Marie Touchet."

"Sire, it is, then, the king of Navarre?"

"It is, love."

Henry went toward her, and Charles took his right hand.

"Look at this hand, Marie," said he: "it is the hand of a good brother and a loyal friend; and but for this hand—"

"Well, sire!"

"But for this hand, this day, Marie, our boy had been fatherless."

Marie uttered a cry, seized Henry's hand, and kissed it.

The king went to the bed where the child was still asleep.

"Eh!" said he, "if this stout boy slept in the Louvre, instead of sleeping in this small house, he would change the aspect of things at present, and perhaps for the future." *

"Sire," said Marie, "without offense to your majesty, I prefer his sleeping here, he sleeps better."

"You are right, Marie," said Charles IX. "Let us sup now."

The two men passed into the dining-room, while the anxious and careful mother covered the little Charles, who slept soundly, with a warm wrapper, and then joined the two kings, between whom she seated herself, and helped both.

"Is it not well, Harry," asked Charles, "to have a place in the world in which we can eat and drink without the necessity of any one tasting your viands before you eat them yourself?"

"I believe, sire," was Henry's rejoinder, "that I can appreciate that better than any one."

"Marie," said the king, "I present to you one of the most intelligent and witty men I know; it is much to say, even at court, and, perhaps, I have understood him better than any one; for I speak of his mind, as well as of his heart."

"Sire," said Henry, "I hope that in exaggerating the one you have no doubt of the other."

"I do not exaggerate anything, Harry," replied the king. "He is, for one thing, a capital master of anagrams. Bid him make one on your name, and I will answer for it he will."

"Oh, what can you find in the name of a poor girl like me? What pleasing idea could such a name as Marie Touchet produce?"

"Sire," said Henry, "it is too easy; there is no merit in finding such an one."

"What! done already?" said Charles. "You see—"

Henry took his tablets from the pocket of his doublet, tore out a page of the paper, and beneath the name "Marie Touchet," he wrote "Je charme tout" ("I charm all"), and then handed the leaf to the young girl.

"Really," she exclaimed, "it is impossible!"

"What has he found?" inquired Charles.

"Sire, I dare not repeat it."

"Sire," said Henry, "in the name of Marie Touchet there is letter for letter, only changing the I into J, which is customary, the words, 'Je charme tout.'"

"So it does," said Charles, "exactly—beautifully! This shall be your device, Marie, and never was device better merited. Thanks, Harry! Marie, I will give it to you set in diamonds."

The supper finished as it struck two o'clock by Notre-Dame.

"Now, Marie," said Charles, "in recompense for the compliment, give him

* This natural child was afterward the famous Duke d'Angoulême, who died in 1650; and had he been legitimate, would have taken precedence of Henry III., Henry IV.. Louis XIII., Louis XIV., etc., and altered the whole line of the royal succession of France.

an armchair, in which he may sleep till daybreak—a long way off from us though, for he snores fearfully. If, Harry, you wake before me, rouse me, for we must be at the Bastille by six o'clock. Good-night—make yourself as comfortable as you can. But," added the king, placing his hand on Henry's shoulder, "on your life, Harry, on your life, do not leave this house without me."

Henry had suspected too much, to feel any desire of despising this caution.

Charles IX. went to his chamber, and Henry, the hardy mountaineer, soon made himself quite comfortable in his armchair, and speedily justified the precaution his brother-in-law had taken in keeping him at a distance. In the morning, Charles aroused him, and as he was dressed, his toilette did not occupy him very long.

They both passed through the bedchamber, where the young girl was sleeping in her bed, and the baby in its cradle. They both were smiling as they slept. Charles looked at them very tenderly, and turning to the king of Navarre, said to him:

"Harry, if you should ever learn what service I have this night rendered you, and any misfortune should happen to me, remember this child which rests here in its cradle." Then, kissing them both, he said, "Adieu, my angels!" and left the apartment. Henry followed, buried deeply in thought.

Two horses, held by his gentlemen, awaited them at the Bastille; Charles made a sign to Henry to mount, and going by the garden of the Arbalete, they went toward the exterior Boulevards. When they reached the Marais, where they were sheltered by the palisades, Charles directed Henry's attention, through the thick haze of the morning, to some men wrapped in long mantles and wearing fur caps, who were on horseback beside a wagon heavily laden.

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, smiling. "I thought so."

"Eh, sire," observed Henry, "is not one of them the Duke d'Anjou!"

"Himself," said Charles. "Keep back, Harry! don't let them see us."

"And who are the other men, and what is in the wagon?"

"The men are the Polish ambassadors, and in the wagon is a crown; and now," he added, putting his horse to a gallop, "come, Harry, for I have seen all I wished to discover."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RETURN TO THE LOUVRE.

WHEN Catherine believed all was arranged in the king of Navarre's chamber, that the dead soldiers were removed, Maurevel conveyed away, and the carpets washed, she dismissed her maids, for it was nearly midnight, and attempted to go to sleep; but the shock had been too severe, the deception too great. The detested Henry eternally escaped her plots, well-laid and deadly as they were; he seemed protected by some invisible power, which Catherine persisted in calling chance, although in the depths of her heart a voice told her that the real name of this power was destiny. Sleep came not to her eyes, and, her brain filled with fresh projects, she rose at break of day, dressed herself and went toward Charles's apartments, where she found his nurse in the antechamber.

"Nurse, I desire to see my son."

"Madame, I will not open the door, except on the formal order of your majesty."

"Open, nurse, I command you."

The nurse, at this voice, more respected and more dreaded than that of Charles himself, presented the key to Catherine; but Catherine had no need of it, drawing from her pocket a key of her own, which opened her son's door in an instant.

The chamber was unoccupied; Charles's couch was undisturbed; and his two greyhounds, lying down on a bearskin, rose, and coming to Catherine, licked her hands.

"Ah!" said the queen, "he has gone out; I will await him."

And she seated herself gloomily in the recess of a window which looked into the principal court of the Louvre. For two hours she remained there, pale and immovable as a marble statue, when at

length she saw a troop of cavaliers enter the gate, at the head of whom she beheld Charles and Henry of Navarre.

Then she comprehended all. Charles, instead of debating with her as to the arrest of his brother-in-law, had carried him off, and thus saved him.

"Blind, blind, blind!" she murmured; and she waited where she was.

A moment afterward she heard footsteps without, and Charles, lifting the tapestry, found himself in the presence of his mother.

Behind him, and looking over his shoulder, was the pale and uneasy countenance of the Béarnais.

"Ah! you here, madame?" said Charles IX., frowning.

"Yes, my son; I wish to speak with you."

"To me?"

"You, and alone,"

"Well, well," said Charles, turning toward his brother-in-law, "since it cannot be avoided, the sooner the better."

"I leave you, sire," said Henry.

"Yes, yes, do," replied Charles; "and since you are a Catholic, Harry, go and hear mass on my behalf; as for me, I shall stay and hear the sermon."

Henry bowed, and left the apartment.

Charles IX., anticipating the questions which his mother would address to him, said, trying to turn the affair into a jest, "Well, madame, pardieu! you are going to scold me, are you not? I made your little plot fail most signally. Well, *mort d'un diable!* I really could not allow to be arrested and conveyed to the Bastille the man who had just saved my life; so forgive me, and confess that the joke was a capital one."

"Sire," replied Catherine, "your majesty is mistaken; it was not a joke."

"Yes, yes, and so you will say, or the devil take me!"

"Sire, you have by your own fault caused the failure of a plan which would have led us to a grand discovery."

"Come," said the king, "come, let us know all about it. What have you to complain of against Harry?"

"Why, that he is in a conspiracy."

"Yes, of course; that is your everlasting accusation."

"Listen," said Catherine, "listen, and you will find a means of proving whether or no I am wrong."

"Well, how, mother?"

"Inquire from Henry who was in his chamber last night; and if he tells you, I am ready to confess that I was wrong."

"But suppose it was a woman, we cannot suppose—"

"A woman?"

"Yes, a woman."

"A woman who killed two of your guards, and has wounded, perhaps mortally, M. de Maurevel!"

"Ah, ah!" said the king, "this grows serious. There has been blood spilled, then?"

"Three men were leveled with the earth."

"And he who left them in this condition—?"

"Escaped, safe and sound."

"By Gog and Magog!" cried Charles. "he was a gallant fellow, and you are right, mother. I should like to know him."

"Well, I tell you beforehand you will not learn who it is, at least from Henry."

"But from you, mother. This man did not flee without leaving some traces—without some portion of his dress being remarked."

"Nothing was observed but the elegant cherry-colored mantle which he wore."

"Ah, ah! a cherry-colored mantle!" said Charles; "I know but one at court so remarkable."

"Precisely," said Catherine.

"Well!" replied Charles.

"Well," answered Catherine, "await me here, my son, while I go to see if my orders have been executed."

Catherine went out, leaving Charles alone, and he paced up and down thoughtfully, whistling a hunting air, with one hand in his doublet and letting the other hang down for his dogs to lick every time he paused.

As to Henry, he had left his brother-in-law's apartments very uneasy, and instead of going along the usual corridor,

he had ascended the small private staircase we have before referred to, and which led to the second story, but scarcely had he gone up four steps than he saw a shadow: he stopped, and put his hand to his dagger, but immediately recognized a female, and a charming voice familiar to his ear said:

"Heaven be praised, sire! you are safe and sound. I was in great alarm about you, but Heaven has heard my prayer."

"What, then, has happened?" inquired Henry.

"You will know when you reach your apartments. Do not be uneasy about Orthon; I have taken care of him."

And the young lady descended the stairs rapidly, passing Henry as if she had met him accidentally.

"This is very strange," said Henry to himself; "what can have happened?—what has occurred to Orthon?"

The question, unfortunately, could not reach Madame de Sauve, for Madame de Sauve was already out of hearing.

At the top of the staircase Henry saw another shadow; it was that of a man.

"Hush!" said this man.

"Ah, ah! is that you, Francois?"

"Do not mention my name."

"What has happened?"

"Go into your rooms, and you will see; then go quietly into the corridor, look carefully about that no one sees you, and come to me—my door will be ajar."

And he disappeared, in his turn, down the staircase, like a ghost in a theater down a trap.

"Ventre-saint-gris!" muttered the Béarnais, "the mystery grows thicker, but as the solution is to be found in my apartment, let us go thither."

He reached the door and listened; there was not a sound. Charlotte had told him to go there, and it was thus evident that there was nothing to fear. He entered, and cast a glance around the antechamber, which was solitary, but nothing indicated that anything had taken place.

"Orthon is not here," he remarked, and went to the inner chamber.

Here all was explained. In spite of the water, which had been copiously used, large red spots stained the floor; a piece of furniture was broken, the hangings of the bed were hacked with sword-cuts, a Venetian mirror was broken by the blow of a bullet, and a blood-stained hand had leaned against the wall, and left against it a terrible imprint, announcing that this chamber had been the mute witness of a mortal struggle. Henry started back, and gazed with haggard eye at all these different details, and passing his hand over his brow, moist with perspiration, he murmured:

"Ah! now I understand the service which the king has done me; they came to assassinate me, and—ah!—De Mouy! what have they done with De Mouy?—Wretches! they have murdered him!"

And anxious to learn the particulars, he hastened to the Duke d'Alencon, who was waiting for him, and taking Henry's hand, and placing his finger on his lips, led him to a small closet in the tower, completely isolated, and consequently out of the reach of all eyes and ears.

"Oh, my brother," he said, "what a horrible night!"

"What has happened?" asked Henry.

"They sought to arrest you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"And wherefore?"

"I know not—where were you?"

"The king took me last night away with him into the city."

"Then he was aware of it," said D'Alencon. "But since you were not here, who was in your rooms?"

"Was any one there?" inquired Henry, as if ignorant of the fact.

"Yes, a man. When I heard the noise, I ran to bring you succor, but it was too late."

"Was the man arrested?" inquired Henry, anxiously.

"No; he escaped, after having dangerously wounded Maurevel and killed two guards."

"Ah, brave De Mouy!" cried Henry.

"Was it, then, De Mouy?" said D'Alencon, quickly.

Henry saw he had committed a fault.

"At least, I presume so," he replied,

"for I had given him an appointment to arrange with him as to your flight, and to tell him that I had ceded to you all my rights to the throne of Navarre."

"Then if De Mouy is known," said D'Alencon, turning pale, "we are lost."

"Yes; for Maurevel will tell."

"Maurevel has been wounded in the throat, and I have learned from the surgeon that he will not speak a word for eight days."

"Eight days! that is a longer time than De Mouy requires to reach a place of safety."

"But it may be some other, and not M. de Mouy."

"Do you think so?" asked Henry.

"Yes; this person disappeared very swiftly, and nothing was seen but a cherry-colored cloak."

"Why, really," remarked Henry, "a cherry-colored cloak is a thing for a fop, not for a soldier; no one would suspect De Mouy of appearing in a cherry-colored cloak."

"No; and if any one were suspected," said D'Alencon, "it would rather be—"

He paused.

"M. de la Mole," said Henry.

"Certainly; since I, who saw him myself, doubted for a moment."

"You doubted? Well, then, it might be M. de la Mole."

"Does he know nothing?" inquired D'Alencon.——"Nothing important."

"Brother," said the duke, "now I really believe it was he."

"Diable!" observed Henry, "if it be he, it will greatly annoy the queen, who takes an interest in him."

"An interest, say you?" said D'Alencon, amazed.

"Unquestionably. Do you not remember, Francois, that it was your sister who recommended him to you?"

"It was, indeed," said the duke; "and if I were sure you would support me, I myself would almost accuse him."

"If you accuse him," replied Henry, "understand, brother, I shall not gainsay you."

"But the queen?" said D'Alencon.

"Ah, yes, the queen!"

"We must know what she will do."

"I will undertake that commission."

"Plague take it, brother! she will be wrong to give us the lie, for only see what a glorious reputation the young fellow will have, and which will have cost him nothing; though, to be sure, he may be called on to pay capital and interest at once."

"Devil take it! what would you have?" inquired Henry. "In this nether world, we have nothing for nothing;" and, saluting D'Alencon, he went rapidly down the staircase to Marguerite's apartments.

The queen of Navarre was hardly more at ease than her husband. The expedition of the night, directed against herself and Madame de Nevers, by the king, the Duke d'Anjou, the Duke de Guise, and Henry, whom she had recognized, had greatly disturbed her. She had gone to bed, but she could not sleep, and trembled at every sound. At this moment, Henry knocked at her door, and Gillonne admitted him at her mistress's order.

Henry paused at the door. Nothing in him announced the injured husband; his habitual smile was on his well-defined lips, and not a muscle of his countenance betrayed the severe emotions he had undergone. He looked at Marguerite, to ascertain if she would allow him to remain alone with her, and Marguerite motioned Gillonne to retire.

"Madame," said Henry, "I know how deeply you are attached to your friends, and I fear I bring you unwelcome tidings."

"What are they, sire?" asked Marguerite.

"One of our best-beloved servitors is greatly compromised at this moment."

"Who?"

"Our dear Comte de la Mole."

"And how?"

"In consequence of the adventure of last night."

Marguerite, in spite of her self-command, could not refrain from blushing.

"What adventure?" she said.

"What!" said Henry; "did you not hear all the noise that was made at the Louvre last night?"

"No, sire."

"Then I congratulate you, madame," said Henry, with much gravity, "for you must have slept very soundly."

"Well, what did pass?"

"Why, our good mother had ordered M. de Maurevel and six of her guards to arrest me."

"You, sire—you?"

"Yes, me."

"And wherefore?"

"Ah! who can tell the 'wherefores' of such a mind as your mother's? I suspect them, but do not know them."

"And you were not in your chamber?"

"No, by accident; you have guessed rightly, madame. Last evening, the king invited me to accompany him. But if I was not in my apartments, some other person was."

"And who was that other person?"

"It appears that it was the Comte de la Mole."

"The Comte de la Mole!" said Marguerite, amazed.

"Tudieu! only imagine what a stout fellow the Provencal was," continued Henry. "Why, he wounded Maurevel and killed two of the guards."

"Wounded M. de Maurevel and killed two of the guards! Impossible!"

"What, do you doubt his courage, madame?"

"No; but I say that M. de la Mole could not be in your apartments."

"Why not?"

"Because — because," answered Marguerite, greatly embarrassed, "because he was elsewhere."

"Ah, if he can prove an *alibi*," observed Henry, "that is another thing. He will say where he was, and there's an end."

"Where he was?" said Marguerite, quickly.

"Assuredly. But, unfortunately, as they have proofs—"

"Proofs! What?"

"Why, the man who made this desperate defense wore a red cloak."

"But is M. de la Mole the only man who wears a red cloak? I know another person also."

"So do I; but then see what will happen. If it was not M. de la Mole, it was some other man in a red cloak like him, and you know who that man is."

"Heavens!"

"This is the breaker ahead of us. You have seen him, as I have, madame; and your emotion proves it. Let us, then, talk the matter over like two persons who speak of a thing the most coveted in the world—a throne; of a thing most precious—life. De Mouy arrested, we are lost!"

"Yes; I understand that."

"While M. de la Mole can compromise nobody, unless he were capable of inventing some such tale as that he was with a party of ladies—how can I tell?"

"Sire," said Marguerite, "if you only fear that, be perfectly easy; he will not so say."

"What!" said Henry, "will he be silent, even if silence cost him his life?"

"He will, sir."

"You are sure?"

"I will answer for him."

"Then all is for the best," said Henry, rising.

"Then you go, sir—"

"To endeavor to get us out of the danger into which this devil of a man in the red cloak has plunged us."

"Ah, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! poor young man!" exclaimed Marguerite, in a paroxysm of grief, and wringing her hands.

"Really," said Henry, as he retired, "this dear M. de la Mole is a very faithful and gentlemanly servitor!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

INTERROGATORIES.

CHARLES entered smiling and jesting into his apartments, but after ten minutes' conversation with his mother it was she who had recovered her good humor, and he who was serious and thoughtful.

"M. de la Mole," said Charles, "M. de la Mole—we must summon Henry and D'Alencon: Henry, because this young man is a Huguenot—D'Alencon, because he is in his service."

"Summon them if you will, my son,

you will learn nothing. I fear there exists a better understanding between Henry and Francois than you imagine."

Charles walked up and down rapidly, biting his lips and pressing his hand to his heart, as if to restrain his wrath.

"No, no," said he, "I will not wait! Let some one summon the Duke d'Alencon, then Henry. I will interrogate them separately. As for you, you can stay, if you please."

The Duke d'Alencon entered. His conversation with Henry had prepared him for this interview; he was therefore perfectly collected.

His answers were most precise. Warned by his mother not to quit his apartments, he was ignorant of the events of the night: only, as those apartments were in the same corridor as the king of Navarre's, he had heard footsteps, then the sound of a door opening, and the report of firearms; he had ventured to open his door slightly, and had seen a man in a red mantle escape. Charles and the queen looked at each other.

"In a red mantle?" said the king.

"Yes."

"And did not this mantle give you any suspicions as to who the person was?"

D'Alencon collected all his presence of mind, in order to lie more naturally.

"I confess," said he, "I thought I recognized the mantle of one of my gentlemen."

"Which of them?"

"M. de la Mole."

"Why was he not in attendance on you?"

"I had given him leave of absence."

"That will do: go."

The duke advanced toward the door.

"No—this way," said Charles, pointing to the door which led to his nurse's apartments.

Charles did not wish Francois and Henry should see each other. He was ignorant that they had already met for a few moments, and that this short time had sufficed to arrange their plans.

Behind D'Alencon, and at a sign from Charles, came Henry.

"Sire," said he, "you have done well to send for me, for I was coming to seek you, to demand justice."

Charles frowned.

"Yes, justice!" said Henry. "I commence by thanking your majesty for having taken me with you last night, for I now know that by so doing you saved my life; but what have I done to deserve being assassinated?"

"It was not an assassination," said Catherine; "it was an arrest."

"Well!" returned Henry, "what crime have I committed? I am as guilty to-day as yesterday. What is my crime, I ask again, sire?"

Charles looked at his mother, somewhat embarrassed for an answer.

"My son," said Catherine, "you hold communication with suspected persons."

"And these suspected persons compromise me—is it not so, madame?"

"Yes, Henry."

"Name them, then—name them—confront me with them!"

"Why, ay," said Charles, "Harry has a right to an explanation."

"And I demand one," said Henry, who saw his advantage, and resolved to use it: "I demand one from my brother Charles, from my mother-in-law Catherine. Since my marriage, have I not been a good husband?—ask Marguerite. A good Catholic?—ask my confessor. A good brother?—ask all those who were at the hunt yesterday."

"It is true, Harry," replied the king; "but they say you conspire."

"Against whom?"

"Against me."

"Sire, were that true, I needed only to have let events take their course when the boar was on you."

"Eh, mort diable! he is right, mother."

"But who was last night in your apartments?"

"Madame," returned Henry, "I can scarcely answer for myself, much less for others. I left my apartments at a quarter past seven, and the king took me with him at nine; and I did not quit his majesty all the night: I could not be with him and in the Louvre at the same time."

"But," said Catherine, "it is not the

less true that some one of your followers killed two of the king's guards, and wounded M. de Maurevel."

"One of my followers!" cried Henry. "Name him, then."

"Every one accuses M. de la Mole."

"M. de la Mole is not in my service, but in that of the Duke d'Alencon, to whom Marguerite recommended him."

"But," said Charles, "was it M. de la Mole who was there?"

"How should I know, sire? I do not say yes or no. M. de la Mole is a very gallant gentleman, devoted to the queen of Navarre, and who often brings me messages from Marguerite, to whom he is very grateful for having recommended him to the Duke d'Alencon, or from the duke himself. I know not if it were he or not."

"It was he," said Catherine; "he was recognized by his red mantle."

"Ah, he has a red mantle?" asked Henry.

"Yes."

"And the man who so maltreated your guards and M. de Maurevel had a red mantle?"

"Exactly so," replied Charles.

"I have nothing to say to that," answered the Béarnais; "but it seems to me that, instead of sending for me, it was M. de la Mole who should have been sent for: but there is one thing I would remark."

"What is that?"

"That if I had resisted the king's order I should be culpable, and merit severe punishment; but it was not me, it was a stranger in no way concerned, whom they sought to arrest; he defended himself, and he had a right to do so."

"Yet—" murmured Catherine.

"Madame," demanded Henry, "was the order to arrest me?"

"Yes; and the king had signed it."

"But was it in the order to arrest any one found in my place?"

"No."

"Well, then," continued Henry, "unless it can be proved I am plotting against the king, and that the man in my chamber is plotting with me, he is innocent. Sire," continued he, turning to Charles IX., "I do not quit the Louvre, or I am ready at your majesty's orders to retire to any state prison you may think fit to indicate, but for the meantime I have a right to declare myself the loyal subject and brother of your majesty."

And saluting them with an air of dignity Charles had never before seen in him, Henry withdrew.

"Bravo, Harry!" cried Charles.

"Bravo! because he has beaten us?"

"And why not? When he hits me in fencing, don't I cry bravo! Mother, you are wrong to despise this young man."

"My son! I do not hate—I fear him."

"Well, you're wrong; for if he were really plotting against me, he only need have let the boar alone yesterday."

"Yes," said Catherine, "and so have made D'Anjou, his personal enemy, king of France."

"Never mind what motive made him save my life; suffice it, he did save it. *Mort de tous les diables!* I will not have him meddled with; as for M. de la Mole, I will speak to D'Alencon about him."

Catherine took her leave. On re-entering her chamber, she found Marguerite waiting for her.

"Ah, ah!" said she, "it is you, my daughter; I sent for you last night."

"This morning, madame, I come to tell your majesty you are about to commit a great injustice; you are going to arrest M. de la Mole."

"It is probable."

"Accused of having killed two of the king's guards, and wounded M. de Maurevel last night, in the king of Navarre's chamber."

"That is what he is charged with."

"He is wrongfully accused; M. de la Mole is not guilty."

"Not guilty!" cried Catherine, joyfully; for she hoped to learn something from what Marguerite was about to tell her.

"No," returned Marguerite, "he cannot be guilty, for he was not there."

"Where was he, then?"

"With me."

"With you?"

"Yes."

Catherine, instead of darting a look of indignation at her daughter, quietly folded her hands in her lap.

"If not M. de la Mole, who was there, then?" said she.

"I know not," returned Marguerite, hesitatingly.

"Come, do not tell me the truth by halves."

"I tell you, madame, I do not know," said Marguerite, turning pale in spite of herself.

"Well, well," said the queen-mother, "we shall find out. Go, my child; your mother watches over your honor."

Marguerite retired.

"Ah!" murmured Catherine, "Henry and Marguerite have an understanding together; provided she is silent, he is blind. Ah, my children, you think yourselves strong in your union, but I will crush you. Besides, all must be known, the day when Maurevel can write or pronounce six letters."

And hereupon Catherine returned to the royal apartments, where she found Charles in conference with D'Alencon.

"You here, ma mere!" said Charles.

"Why not say *again*, for that was in your thoughts?"

"I keep my thoughts to myself," returned the king, with that harsh tone he sometimes adopted even to Catherine. "What have you to say?"

"That you were right, Charles; and you, D'Alencon, wrong."

"How?" cried both together.

"It was not La Mole who was in the king of Navarre's apartments."

"Who then?" asked Charles.

"We shall know when Maurevel is recovered, but let us speak of La Mole."

"What do you want with him, since he was not with the king of Navarre?"

"No, but he was with the queen."

"The queen?" cried Charles, bursting into a loud laugh. "No, no, Guise told us he met her litter."

"Just so," said Catherine; "she has a house in Paris."

"Rue Cloche-Percée?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Ah!" cried the king suddenly, "it must have been he who threw a dish on my head last night—the scoundrel!"

"Doubtless," replied Catherine; "and we must take heed to the matter at once, for the least indiscretion of this gentleman might occasion a terrible noise. It needs but a moment of intoxication—"

"Or of vanity," said Francois.

"Doubtless," returned Charles; "but we cannot carry the cause before the judges, until Henry consents."

"My son," said Catherine, significantly, "a crime has been committed, and there may be scandal. Were you simple gentlemen, I should need say nothing to you, for you are both brave; but you are princes, and cannot cross swords with an inferior in rank; think, then, how to avenge yourselves as princes."

"*Mort de tous les diables!*" said Charles; "I will think of it."

"I leave you," said Catherine, "but I leave you this to represent me."

As she spoke, she untied the silken cord that passed thrice round her waist, and of which the two tassels fell to her knees, and cast it at the feet of the two princes.

"Ah," said Charles, "I understand."

"This cord—" said D'Alencon.

"Is punishment and silence," replied Catherine; "but, first, it will be as well to mention the thing to Henry."

And she retired.

"Pardieu!" replied D'Alencon, "a good suggestion. I will send for Henry."

"No," said Charles, "I will see him myself; do you inform D'Anjou and Guise."

And quitting his apartments, he ascended the private staircase which led to Henry's chamber.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PROJECTS OF VENGEANCE.

HENRY had profited by the moment's respite from the examination he had undergone, to fly to Madame de Sauve's. There he found Orthon quite recovered, but the latter could tell him nothing, except that some armed men had entered the apartment, and that one of them had struck him with the hilt of his sword.

As for Orthon, no one had taken any heed to him: Catherine had seen him senseless, and believed he was dead. On coming to himself, in the interval between her departure and the arrival of the captain of the guard, he had taken refuge with Madame de Sauve.

Henry besought Charlotte to let the young man remain with her until he heard from De Mouy, who would certainly write to him. He would then dispatch Orthon to him, and instead of one, have two men, on whom to rely in any emergency. This plan formed, he had returned to his apartment, and was musing deeply, when the door opened and Charles entered.

"Your majesty!" cried Henry.

"I myself. Harry, you are an excellent fellow, and I love you more and more."

"Sire," said Henry, "you overwhelm me."

"You have but one fault."

"If your majesty will explain yourself, I will seek to correct it," said Henry, who saw by the king's face he was in an excellent humor.

"It is, that having good eyes you do not use them."

"Bah!" said Henry; "am I, then, near sighted without knowing it?"

"Worse than that, you are blind."

"If that be so, will your majesty aid me to recover my sight?"

"When Guise told you last night he saw your wife pass with a gallant, you would not believe it."

"Sire, how could I believe your majesty's sister would commit such an indiscretion?"

"When he told you your wife had gone to the Rue Cloche-Percée, you would not believe that."

"I could not suppose a princess of the royal blood would thus publicly risk her reputation."

"When we besieged the house, and I received a silver dish on my shoulder, D'Anjou a plate of orange jam on his head, and Guise a haunch of venison in his face, did you not see two men and two women?"

"I saw nothing."

"Eh, corbœuf! I did, then."

"Ah, if your majesty saw anything, that makes it another thing."

"That is, I saw two men and two women; one of the women, I am sure, was Margot, and one of the men La Mole."

"But," said Henry, "if M. de la Mole was in the Rue Cloche-Percée, he could not be here."

"No, no, he was not here; but never mind that, we shall know who was here when that blockhead Maurevel can write or speak. The question is touching Margot, who deceives you, and her lover, whom we are going to strangle."

Henry started, and looked with an air of bewilderment at the king.

"You won't be sorry for that, I know, Harry. Margot will cry like a thousand Niobes, but I won't have you made a fool of. Let D'Anjou deceive Conde, I do not care; Conde is my enemy—but you are my brother, my friend."

"But, sire—"

"I will not have you molested; you are deceived, but you shall have such a reparation, that to-morrow every one shall say '*Mille noms d'un diable!* The king loves his brother Harry, for he twisted M. de la Mole's neck finely for his sake last night.'"

"Are you quite resolved, sire?" asked Henry.

"Quite; we are going on an expedition against the rascal; myself, D'Anjou, D'Alencon, and Guise. A king, two princes of the blood, and a sovereign prince, without reckoning yourself."

"How! without reckoning me?"

"Of course you will be with us."

"But, sire, do you know for certain—?"

"Why, the rascal boasts of it. He goes sometimes to see her at the Louvre, sometimes at the Rue Cloche-Percée: take a dagger with you."

"Sire," said Henry, "upon reflection, your majesty will comprehend that I cannot take part in this expedition. I am too much interested in it, not to have my presence ascribed to a desire of vengeance. Your majesty punishes a man who calumniates your sister; and Marguerite, whom I maintain innocent, is not dishonored; but if I am associated with it, my

co-operation converts an act of justice into murder—my wife is no longer calumniated, she is guilty."

"Mordieu, Harry! as I told my mother just now, you have the quickest wit of all of us."

And Charles regarded his brother-in-law complacently. Henry bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Well, well, leave all to me. It shall not be the worse executed."

"I leave it all in your hands."

"At what time does he usually go to your wife's apartments?"

"About nine o'clock."

"And at what hour does he leave?"

"Before I come, for I never see him."

"What time is that?"

"About eleven."

"Good; come down this evening at midnight, all will be over."

And Charles, after shaking Henry's hand, and renewing his protestations of friendship, left the apartment, whistling a favorite hunting air.

Henry laughed as he could laugh when no one was there to hear him.

"Ventre-saint-gris!" said he, "I will wager anything the queen-mother is at the bottom of all this. She does nothing but try to get up quarrels between my wife and me."

At seven o'clock the same evening, a young man who had just left the bath, perfumed and attired himself, humming a gay air the while. Beside him slept, or rather reclined on the bed, another young man. This one was La Mole, the other Coconnas.

"Where are you going to-night?" asked the latter.

"Where am I going?" said La Mole. "I am going to the queen."

"Ah, true! I forgot. Here is your mantle."

"No, that is the black; I want the cherry one; the queen prefers me in that."

"Ah, ma foi!" said Coconnas; "look for yourself; I do not see it."

"Not see it!" replied La Mole. "Where can it be, then?"

At this moment, as, having turned everything upside down, La Mole was beginning to abuse the thieves who dared even rob in the Louvre, the door opened, and a page of the Duke d'Alencon appeared with the mantle in question.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "here it is."

"Yes, sir, monseigneur sent for it, to decide a wager about its color."

The page retired, and La Mole clasped on his cloak.

"Well," said he to Coconnas, "what are you going to do?"

"I do not know."

"Bah; well, au revoir!"

"That La Mole is a terrible fellow," thought Coconnas; "he's always wanting to know where one is going, as if one knew;" and he composed himself to sleep.

As for La Mole, he betook himself to the queen of Navarre's apartments.

In the corridor he met the Duke d'Alencon.

"Ah, 'tis you, La Mole!" said he.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Are you going out of the Louvre?"

"No, your highness, I am going to pay my respects to the queen of Navarre."

"At what time shall you quit her?"

"Has monseigneur any orders for me?"

"No, but I shall have this evening."

"At what hour?"

"From nine to ten."

"I will not fail to wait on your highness."

"Well, I rely upon you."

La Mole bowed, and went on.

"It is very strange," thought he, "the duke is pale sometimes as a corpse."

And he knocked at the door. Gillonne, who seemed to be watching his arrival, opened it and conducted him to the queen. Marguerite was occupied with something that seemed to fatigue her greatly; a paper covered with notes, and a volume of Isocrates lay before her. She signed to La Mole to let her finish the sentence; and then, casting aside her pen, invited him to sit by her.

La Mole had never seemed so handsome and so gay.

"Greek!" cried he, glancing at the volume; "Isocrates! what are you doing? Ah, and on this paper Latin—'*Ad*

Sarmatiæ legatos reginæ Margaritæ concio'—you are going to harangue these barbarians in Latin, then?"

"I must, since they do not understand French. They arrived this morning; and you will find," added Marguerite, with a slight air of pedantry, "that what I have written is Ciceronian enough; but let us talk of what has happened to you."

"To me?"

"Yes!"

"What has happened to me?"

"Ay, what has happened to you?—you look pale."

"I confess it, but it is from too much sleep."

"Come, come, do not boast, I know all."

"Tell me what you mean, for I know not."

"Listen; De Mouy, surprised last night in the apartments of the king of Navarre, whom they wished to arrest, killed three men, and escaped without being recognized, except by the red mantle he wore."

"Well!"

"This red mantle, which deceived me, has deceived others also. You are suspected of this triple murder. This morning you would have been tried and condemned, for I knew that you would not, even to save yourself, say where you really were."

"Say where I was?" cried La Mole; "oh, never, never! I would have died joyfully to spare your glorious eyes but one tear."

"Alas, my poor friend!" replied the queen, "my glorious eyes would have wept many, many tears!"

"But how was this storm appeased?"

"Guess."

"I cannot."

"There was but one way of proving you were not in the king's chamber."

"And that was—"

"To say where you were."

"Well!"

"And I said it."

"To whom?"

"To my mother."

"And Queen Catherine—"

"Knows that I love you."

"Oh, madame, after having done so much for me, my life belongs to you!"

"I have snatched it from those who wished to take it; but now you are saved."

"Saved by you!" cried the young man; "by you, whom I adore—"

At this moment, a sharp noise made them both start. La Mole recoiled, and Marguerite, uttering a cry, fixed her eyes on a broken pane in the window. By this pane a large stone had entered, and lay on the floor.

La Mole saw the broken window, and, comprehending the cause of the noise:

"Who has dared do this?" cried he.

"Stay," said Marguerite; "it seems to me something is fastened to the stone."

"It looks like a billet," replied La Mole.

Marguerite eagerly caught up the stone, round which was wound a slip of paper. The paper was fastened to a thread which passed out of the window.

Marguerite opened and read it.

"Oh, heavens!" cried she, holding out the paper, "La Mole!"

He looked and read:

"M. de la Mole is waited for by long swords in the corridor leading to M. d'Alencon's apartments; perhaps he would prefer leaving the Louvre by this window, and joining M. de Mouy at Mantes."

"But," said La Mole, "are these swords longer than mine?"

"No, but there are perhaps ten against one."

"From whom comes this billet?" asked La Mole.

Marguerite looked attentively at it.

"The writing of the king of Navarre," said she. "If he warns us, the danger is real—fly, then, fly!"

"How?"

"Does it not mention the window?"

"Command, and I will leap from the window, were it twenty times as high!"

"Stay," said Marguerite, "this string supports a weight."

"Let us see."

And both drawing toward them the

string, saw the extremity of a ladder of silk.

"Ah, you are saved," said Marguerite.

"It is a miracle of Heaven!"

"No, it is a gift of the king of Navarre."

"What if it were a snare laid for me," said La Mole. "What if this ladder were to break beneath me: have you not to-day avowed your love for me, Marguerite?"

Marguerite, to whose cheeks joy had restored the color, became deadly pale.

"You are right," said she; "it is possible." And she darted toward the door.

"Where are you going?" cried La Mole.

"To assure myself you are really waited for on the corridor."

"Never, lest their vengeance fall on you!"

"What can they do to me? A queen and a woman, I am doubly inviolable."

The queen said this with so much dignity that La Mole felt she ran no risk, and that it was best to let her do as she wished. Marguerite intrusted La Mole to Gillonne, leaving it to her sagacity to decide, according to circumstances, whether he should fly, or await her return. She advanced into the corridor that led to the library and a suite of reception-rooms, which opened into the king's and queen-mother's apartments, and to the private staircase leading to D'Alencon's apartments.

Although scarcely nine, all the lights were extinguished, and, except a slight glimmer at the end, the corridor was quite dark. The queen advanced with a firm step, but arrived half-way, she heard a sound of voices whispering, and the pains they took not to be heard, gave them a mysterious and hollow sound, but all noise soon ceased, and the light, feeble as it was, seemed to diminish.

Marguerite advanced; she seemed calm, but in reality the clenching of her hands showed violent nervous agitation. As she approached the lights, the silence seemed to grow more intense, and a shadow like a hand obscured the flickering ray. Suddenly a man sprang forward, uncovered a taper, and exclaimed:

"Here he is!"

Marguerite found herself opposite Charles, behind him stood D'Alencon, a cord of silk in his hand. At the back two shadows were visible, with swords in their hands.

Marguerite saw all this at a glance, and replied, smilingly:

"You mean here *she* is."

Charles recoiled; the rest stood motionless.

"You here, Margot, at this hour?" said he.

"Is it, then, so late?"

"I ask you where are you going?"

"To fetch one of the volumes of Cicero, left in our mother's apartments."

"Without a light?"

"I thought the corridor was lighted."

"And you come from your own apartments?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing?"

"Preparing my speech for the Polish ambassadors."

"Is any one helping you?"

Marguerite made a violent effort.

"M. de la Mole," replied she. "He is very learned."

"So much so," said D'Alencon, "that I requested him to help me, as I am not so clever as you are."

"You are waiting for him?"

"Yes," returned D'Alencon, impatiently.

"Then," said Marguerite, "I will send him to you."

"And your book!" said Charles.

"Gillonne can fetch it."

The two brothers interchanged a sign.

"Go, then," said Charles. "We will continue our round."

"Your round?" asked Marguerite—"whom are you looking for, then?"

"The little red man," returned Charles; "do not you know he is said to haunt the Louvre? D'Alencon says he has seen him, and we are in search of him."

"Success to your chase," said Marguerite.

In a second she was at her door.

"Open, Gillonne!" cried she.

Gillonne obeyed.

Marguerite sprang into the apartment, and found La Mole resolute and calm—his sword drawn. "Fly!" said the queen; "fly instantly!—there is no time to be lost!"

During her absence, La Mole had attached the ladder, and he now stepped on it, after having tenderly embraced the queen.

"Should I perish, remember your promise!" said he.

"It is not a promise, but an oath. Adieu!"

Encouraged by these words, La Mole glided down the ladder.

At this moment some one knocked at the door.

Marguerite did not quit the window until she had seen La Mole reach the ground in safety.

"Madame!" said Gillonne; "madame!"

"Well."

"The king is knocking at the door."

"Open it." Gillonne did so.

The four princes, doubtless impatient, stood at the threshold; Charles entered.

Marguerite advanced to meet him.

The king cast a rapid glance around.

"Whom are you seeking?" asked the queen.

"Whom am I seeking?" said Charles. "Corbœuf! I am seeking M. de la Mole."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Yes! where is he?"

Marguerite took her brother's hand and led him to the window.

At this moment, two men from beneath the window started off on horseback, at full speed; one of them detached his white satin scarf, and waved it in the air. They were La Mole and Orthon.

Marguerite pointed them out with her finger to Charles.

"What does this mean?" asked he.

"It means," returned Marguerite, "that M. d'Alencon may put his cord in his pocket, and MM. d'Anjou and Guise may sheathe their swords, for M. de la Mole will not pass through the corridor to-night."

CHAPTER XL.

THE ATRIDES.

SINCE his return to Paris, Henry d'Anjou had not had a confidential interview with his mother Catherine, of whom, as everybody knows, he was the favorite son.

And Catherine really preferred this child for his courage, or even more for his beauty. She alone knew of his return to Paris, of which Charles IX. would have remained ignorant, if chance had not conducted him to the Hotel de Conde at the moment when his brother was quitting it. Charles had not expected him until the next day, and Henry d'Anjou had hoped to conceal from him the two motives which had hastened his arrival by a day, namely, his visit to the lovely Marie de Cleves, Princess de Conde, and his conference with the Polish ambassadors.

When the Duke d'Anjou, so long expected, entered his mother's apartment, Catherine, usually so cold and unmoved, and who, since the departure of her son, had embraced no one with warmth except Coligny, who was to be murdered next day, opened her arms to the child of her love, and pressed him to her heart with an effusion of maternal affection astonishing to find in that withered heart.

"Ah, madame," said he, "since Heaven gives me the satisfaction of embracing my mother without witness, pray console the most wretched man in the world."

"Eh, mon Dieu! my dearest child," cried Catherine, "what has happened to you?"

"Nothing that you do not know, mother; I am in love; I am beloved; but this very love, which would form the bliss of any other, causes my misery."

"Explain yourself, my son," said Catherine.

"Ah! mother—these ambassadors—this departure."

"Yes," said Catherine, "the ambassadors have arrived—the departure is nigh at hand."

"It need not be nigh at hand, but my brother urges it; he hates me; I am in his way, and he would fain be rid of me."

Catherine smiled.

"By giving you a throne?—unhappy crowned head!"

"Oh, I need it not, mother," replied Henry, in agony; "I do not wish to go. I! a son of France! brought up in the refinement of polished manners, beside a tender mother; beloved by one of the most charming women on earth, must I go, then, amid snows at the furthest extremity of the earth, to die by inches, among coarse rough people, who are intoxicated from morning till night, and gauge the capacities of their king as they do those of a cask, according to the quantity it can hold! No, no, my mother, I will not go; I will die first!"

"Courage, Henry," said Catherine, pressing his hands between her own, "let us inquire into the real reason."

Henry lowered his eyes, as if he dared not let his mother read what was in his heart.

"Is there no other reason," she asked, "less romantic, more reasonable, more public?"

"Mother, it is not my fault if this idea dwells in my mind, and perchance retains a place it should not hold; but have you not said yourself that the horoscope of my brother Charles prophesies that he will die young?"

"Yes," replied Catherine, "but a horoscope may lie, my son. I myself, at this moment, hope that all horoscopes are not true."

"But did not his horoscope declare this?"

"His horoscope spoke of a quarter of a century, but did not say if it were for his life or for his reign."

"Well, then, dear mother, contrive that I remain; my brother is nearly four-and-twenty, and another year must decide."

Catherine pondered deeply. "Yes, assuredly," she said, "it would be better if it could be so arranged."

"Oh, judge then, my mother," cried Henry, "what despair for me, if I were to exchange the crown of France for the crown of Poland! To be tormented there with the idea that I might reign at the Louvre, in the midst of this lettered and elegant court, near the best mother in the world, whose counsels would save me one half of my fatigue and labors, who, accustomed to bear with my father a portion of the burden of the state, would kindly bear it also with me. Ah, my mother, I should have been a great king!"

"Come, come, my dearest child," said Catherine, to whom this prospect had always been a very sweet hope, "come, do not despair. Have you thought of any way by which this could be arranged?"

"Yes, assuredly, and that is the principal reason why I returned two or three days before I was expected, making my brother Charles believe that it was for Madame de Conde; then I have formed an acquaintance with Lasco, the principal envoy, doing all I could to make myself unpopular and disliked, and I hope I have succeeded."

"Ah, my dear son," said Catherine, "that is bad; we must always put the interest of France before your petty dislikes."

"Mother, does the interest of France require, in case of any misfortune happening to my brother Charles, that D'Alencon or the king of Navarre should ascend the throne?"

"Oh, the king of Navarre! Never! never!" murmured Catherine.

"Ma foi!" continued Henry, "my brother D'Alencon is no better, and does not love you more."

"Well," asked Catherine, "and what said Lasco?"

"Lasco hesitated when I pressed him to seek an audience. Oh! if he would write to Poland, and annul the election."

"Folly, my son; very madness! What a Diet has consecrated is sacred."

"But then, mother, could not these Poles accept my brother in my stead?"

"This is difficult, if not impossible."

"Never mind: try; speak to the king, mother; ascribe all to my love for Madame de Conde; say I am mad, crazy about her. He saw me, besides, leave the hotel of the prince with Guise, who does me every service in that quarter."

"Yes, in order to make his league; you do not perceive this, but I do."

"Yes, mother, yes; but, in the meantime, I make use of him. Should we not be glad when a man serves us while serving himself?"

"And what said the king when he met you?"

"He seemed to believe what I told him, which was, that love only had brought me back to Paris."

"But did he not ask you for any account of the rest of the night?"

"Yes, mother; but I went to sup at Nantouillet's, where I made a great riot, so that the king might hear of it, and have no suspicion as to where I was."

"Then he knows nothing of your visit to Lasco?"

"Nothing."

"So much the better. I will try, then, to speak for you, my poor boy; but you know the intractable disposition of him with whom I have to deal."

"Charles will not allow me to remain. He detests me."

"He is jealous of you, my beautiful hero! Why are you so brave and fortunate? Why, at scarcely twenty years of age, have you gained battles like Alexander and Cæsar? But do not open your heart to every one. Pretend to be resigned, and pay your court to the king. Leave all the rest to me. Apropos, and how succeeded your expedition of last night?"

"It failed, mother. The gay gallant was warned, and escaped by the window."

"Some day," said Catherine, "I shall learn who is the bad genius who thus counteracts all my projects. In the meanwhile, I have my suspicion. Malediction be on him!"

"Then, mother—" said the Duke d'Anjou.

"Leave me to manage all;" and kissing Henry tenderly, he left the apartment.

The princes of the house then arrived. Charles was in a capital humor; for the assurance of his sister Marguerite had rather pleased than vexed him. He felt no offense against La Mole otherwise, and had awaited him with some ardor in the corridor, simply because it was a kind of chase.

D'Alencon, on the other hand, was much preoccupied. The repulsion he had always felt for La Mole had changed into hate from the moment he knew that he was beloved by his sister. Marguerite was, at the same time, meditative and alert. She had to remember and to watch. The Polish deputies had sent a copy of the harangues to be pronounced.

Marguerite, to whom no more mention had been made of the occurrences of the previous evening, than if they had never taken place, read the discourses; and, except Charles, every one discussed what the replies should be. Charles allowed Marguerite to reply as she pleased. He was somewhat difficult in his choice of words for D'Alencon; but as to the discourse of Henry d'Anjou, he attacked it bitterly, and made endless corrections and additions.

This meeting, without having any decisive issue, tended to envenom the feelings of all. Henry d'Anjou, who had to rewrite nearly all his discourse, went out to perform his task. Marguerite, who had not heard of the king of Navarre since he had broken her window pane, went to his apartment, in the hope of finding him there. D'Alencon, who had read the hesitation in his brother D'Anjou's eyes, aud surprised a meaning look between him and his mother, withdrew to ponder over what might be the fresh plot. Charles was going to his forge to finish a boar-spear he was making for himself, when Catherine stopped him.

Charles, who expected some opposition to his will from his mother, paused and gazed sternly on her.

"Well," said he, "and what now?"

"One other word, sire: we had forgotten it, and yet it is of much importance. What day do you fix for the public reception?"

"True!" said the king, seating himself; "let us talk it over, mother. Well, what day shall it be?"

"I think," replied Catherine, "that in your majesty's silence, your apparent forgetfulness, there was something of deep calculation."

"Why so, mother?"

"Because," added the queen-mother, very quietly, "there is no need, my son, as it appears to me, that the Poles should see us crave their crown with such avidity."

"On the contrary, mother," said Charles, "they have hastened, by forced marches, from Warsaw hither. Honor for honor—politeness for politeness!"

"Your majesty may be right in one sense, as in another I am not wrong. Your opinion then is, that the public reception should be hastened?"

"Certainly; and is it not yours also?"

"You know that I have no opinions but such as are connected with your glory: and I tell you, then, that thus hastening the affair, I should fear that you might be accused of profitting very quickly by this occasion which presents itself for relieving France of the costs and charges of your brother; but which assuredly he repays by rendering it back in glory and devotion."

"Mother," said Charles, "when my brother leaves France, I will so richly endow him that no one will even dare to think that you fear what they may say—"

"Well," said Catherine, "I give up, since you have such good answers to all my objections; but to receive this warlike people, who judge of the power of states from exterior signs, you must have a considerable display of troops; and I do not think that there are yet enough assembled in the Ile-de-France?"

"Excuse me, mother, but I had foreseen this event, and was prepared for it. I have recalled two battalions from Normandy; one from Guienne: my company of archers arrived yesterday from Brittany: the light horse spread over Lorraine will be in Paris in the course of the day, and, while it is supposed that I can scarcely command four regiments, I have twenty thousand men ready to appear."

"Ah! ah!" said Catherine, surprised, "then there is only one thing wanting; but that you will procure."

"What is that?"

"Money; I imagine you have not a superabundance."

"On the contrary, madame, on the contrary," said Charles IX.; "I have fourteen hundred thousand crowns in the Bastille: my private estates have this week brought me in eight hundred thousand crowns, which I have buried in my cellars in the Louvre; and in case of need, Nantouillet has three hundred thousand crowns besides, at my disposal."

Catherine trembled; for she had before seen Charles violent and passionate, but never provident.

"Well, then," she added, "your majesty thinks of everything — admirable! and if the tailors, embroiderers and jewelers use dispatch, your majesty will be ready to give this audience in less than six weeks."

"Six weeks!" exclaimed Charles, "why, mother, the tailors, embroiderers, and jewelers have been hard at work since the day when they learned of my brother's nomination, and all may be ready to-day, perhaps, but certainly in three or four days."

"Ah," murmured Catherine; "you are in greater haste than I thought, my son."

"Honor for honor, as I have already said."

"Good; then it is this honor done to the house of France that flatters you—is it not?"——"Assuredly."

"And to see a son of France on the throne of Poland is your chief desire?"

"Precisely so."

"Then it is the fact, and not the man, that affects you, and whoever may reign there—"

"No, no, mother, corbœuf! no. Let us be as we are! The Poles have made a good choice—they are skillful, clever fellows! A military nation, a people of soldiers, they take a captain for their ruler. Peste! — D'Anjou is their man. The hero of Jarnac and Montcontour suits them like a glove. Whom would you have me send them? D'Alencon—a coward!—he would give them a fine idea of the house of Valois! D'Alencon would flee the very first ball that whistled by his ears, while Henry d'Anjou is a warrior bold and tried; his sword always in his hand, always on the march, on his

war-horse or on foot. Forward — cut down, thrust, crush, slay! Ah, he is a brave and skillful man, my brother D'Anjou: a gallant soldier, who'll give them fighting from morning till night—from the first of January to the thirty-first of December! He is not a hard drinker, it is true; but he will do his work in cold blood, you see. He will be in his element, dear Henry will!—On! on! to the field of battle! bravo, trumpets and drums! Vive le roi! Long live the conqueror! Long live the general! They will proclaim him emperor three times a year! This will be admirable for the house of France and the honor of the Valois! he may be killed, perchance; but, ventre-mahom! it will be a glorious death!"

Catherine shuddered, but her eyes glanced fire.

"Say," she cried, "that you wish to send your brother, Henry d'Anjou, away. Say you do not love your brother."

"Ah, ah, ah!" exclaimed Charles, laughing nervously; "what, have you divined that I wished to send him away? Have you divined that I do not love him? And suppose it were so? Love my brother!—why should I love my brother? Ah, ah, ah! would you make me laugh?" and as he spoke, his pale cheeks were animated with feverish red. "Does he love me? Do you love me? Is there, except my dogs, Marie Touchet, and my nurse, is there one living thing that has ever loved me? No, no, I do not love my brother; I love only myself — do you understand? and I do not prevent my brother from doing as I do."

"Sire," said Catherine, becoming animated in her turn, "since you unfold your heart to me, I must open mine to you. You act like a weak king—like an ill-advised king: you send away your second brother, the natural support of your throne, who is, in all respects, fit to succeed you, if any misfortune happened to you—leaving, in this event, your crown in jeopardy; for, as you said, D'Alencon is young, incapable, weak — more than weak — cowardly! and the Béarnais is waiting in the background!"

"Well, *mort de tout les diables!*" cried Charles, "what is that to me when I am dead? The Béarnais is waiting in the background, say you? Corbœuf, so much the better! I said I loved no one —I was wrong: I love Harry—yes, I love the good Harry, with his free air and his warm hand, while I see around me none but false eyes, and touch none but ice-cold hands. He is incapable of treason toward me, I will swear! Besides, I owe a recompense: they poisoned his mother, poor fellow; some persons of my family, too, it is said. Besides, I am in good health; but if I felt sick, I would send for him, and he should not quit my side: I would take nothing but from his hand; and, should I die, I would make him king of France and Navarre, and, ventre du pape! instead of laughing at my death, as my brother would do, he would weep, or at least appear to do so."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Catherine's feet, she would have been less alarmed than at these words. She remained aghast, looking at Charles with a haggard eye; and then, at the end of a few seconds, she cried:

"Henry of Navarre! Henry of Navarre, king of France, to the prejudice of my children! Ah, sainte Madona! we will see! It is for this you would send away my son of Anjou?"

"Your son! and what, then, am I—a son of the wolf, like Romulus?" cried Charles, trembling with rage and his eye sparkling as if it were on fire. "Your son! You are right; and the king of France, then, is not your son? The king of France has no brothers; the king of France has no mother; the king of France has no subjects! the king of France has no need of sentiment—he has will. He can do without being loved, but he will be obeyed!"

"Sire, you have mistaken my words. I called him my son who is about to leave me. I love him better at this moment, because I fear to lose him at this moment. Is it a crime for a mother to desire that her son should not leave her?"

"And I—I tell you he shall leave you. I tell you he shall leave France, and go to Poland, and that in two days—and if

you add one word, in one day—to-morrow; and if you do not smooth your brow, and I will strangle him to-night, as you would have strangled your daughter's lover yesternight; only I will not miss my clutch of him as we did of La Mole."

At this threat Catherine bent down her head, and then again instantly raised it.

"Ah, poor child!" she said, "your brother would kill you; but be tranquil, your mother will defend you."

"Do you brave me?" cried Charles. "Well, then, by all the devils! he shall die—not this evening, but this very moment. A weapon! a weapon! a dagger! a knife!—ah!"

Charles, after having vainly sought all around for what he asked for, saw the small stiletto which his mother wore at her girdle, seized it, drew it from its shagreen and silver case, and rushed out of the chamber, with the determination of striking Henry d'Anjou wherever he found him; but on reaching the vestibule, his overexcited strength gave way suddenly, and, extending his arm, he let fall the keen weapon, which stuck in the floor, and uttering a lamentable cry, he swooned and fell on the floor, while the blood flowed abundantly from his nose and his mouth.

"Help!" he cried; "they kill me! help! help!"

Catherine, who had followed, saw him fall, looked at him for an instant without moving or calling, and then recalled to herself, not by maternal instinct, but by the difficulty of her situation, she opened a door, and shrieked out:

"The king is taken ill. Help! help!"

At this cry, a crowd of servants, officers, and courtiers, hastened to the young king; but foremost of all a woman rushed on, pushing aside the crowd, and raised Charles, who was as pale as a corpse.

"They are killing me, nurse—they are killing me!" murmured the king, bathed in perspiration and blood.

"They are killing my Charles!" cried the good creature, looking every one in the face in a way that made even Catherine retreat; "and who is killing you?"

Charles uttered a sigh and again fainted.

"Ah, ah!" said the doctor, Ambroise Pare, whom they had sent for; "ah! the king is very ill."

"Now, by choice of compulsion," said the implacable Catherine to herself, "he must accede to a delay;" and she left the king to go to her second son, who was awaiting in the oratory the result of an interview so vitally important to himself.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HOROSCOPE.

On leaving the oratory, in which her son had been acquainted with what had passed, Catherine found Rene in her chamber.

"Well," asked the queen, "have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"How is he?"

"Rather better."

"Can he speak?"

"No, the sword has traversed the larynx."

"I told you to make him write."

"I tried, but he could only trace two letters, and then fainted; the jugular vein has been cut into, and the loss of blood has greatly weakened him."

"Have you seen these letters?"

"Here they are."

Rene took a paper from his pocket, and presented it to the queen, who hastily opened it.

"An *m* and an *o*," said she. "Can it be, after all, M. de la Mole—and that the confession of Marguerite's was only to avert suspicion?"

"Madame," returned Rene, "if I may venture an opinion, I should say M. de la Mole is too much in love to trouble his head about politics; and, above all, too much in love with Madame Marguerite to serve her husband very devotedly, for there is no deep love without jealousy."

"You think him in love, then?"

"Desperately."

"Has he had recourse to you?"

"Yes; I made him a waxen image."

"Pierced to the heart?"

"To the heart."

"Have you it still?"

"At my house."

"I wonder," said Catherine, "if these cabalistic preparations have really the power attributed to them?"

"Your majesty knows even more than I what their influence is."

"Does Marguerite love La Mole?"

"Sufficiently to ruin herself for him. Yesterday she saved him at the risk of her honor and her life; you see all this, and yet you doubt."

"Doubt what?"

"Science."

"I doubt because science has deceived me," looking fixedly at Rene.

"On what occasion?"

"Rene, have your perfumes lost their odor?"

"No, madame; not when I prepare them."

"Well, well," said Catherine, "we will speak of that some other time. Tell me what is necessary to arrive at an idea of the probable length of a person's life?"

"To know, first, the day of his birth, his age, and what constellation he was born under."

"Next?"

"To have some of his blood and hair."

"If I bring and tell you all you require, can you tell me the probable time of his death?"

"Yes, within a few days."

"I have his hair, and I will procure some of his blood."

"Was he born in the day, or during the night?"

"At twenty-three minutes past five in the evening."

"Be with me to-morrow at five o'clock; the experiment must be made at the precise hour of the birth."

"Good!" said Catherine. "*We* will be there."

Rene saluted, and retired without affecting to notice the "*we*," which indicated that, contrary to her usual habits, the queen would not come alone.

The next morning, at daybreak, Catherine entered her son Charles's apartment; she had inquired after him at midnight, and was informed that Maitre Ambroise Pare was with him, and intended bleeding him if the same nervous agitation continued. Shuddering even in his slumbers, pale from loss of blood, Charles slept, his head resting on his faithful nurse's shoulder, who, leaning against the bed, had not changed her position for three hours, fearing to disturb him.

Catherine asked if her son had not been bled. The nurse replied he had, and so abundantly that he had twice fainted.

The blood was in a basin in the adjoining room; Catherine entered, under pretense of examining it, and while so doing, she filled with it a phial she had brought with her for the purpose, then returned, hiding her red fingers, that would otherwise have betrayed her, in her pockets.

As she reappeared, Charles opened his eyes, and perceived his mother; then, recollecting the events of the previous evening, "Ah! it is you, madame," said he; "well, you may tell your dear son, Henry d'Anjou, it will be to-morrow."

"It shall be when you please, my dear Charles; compose yourself, and go to sleep."

Charles closed his eyes, and Catherine left the room, but no sooner had she quitted it, than Charles, raising himself, cried, "Send for the chancellor—the court—I want them all!"

The nurse replaced his head upon her shoulder, and sought to lull him to sleep.

"No, no, nurse!" said he, "I shall not sleep any more. Summon my people; I wish to work to-day."

When Charles spoke thus, no one dared disobey, and even the nurse, spite of the familiarity she enjoyed, did not venture to dispute his orders. The chancellor was summoned, and the audience fixed, not for the morrow, but for the fifth day from that time.

At five o'clock, the queen and the Duke d'Anjou proceeded to Rene's, who, in expectation of their visit, had prepared everything for the experiment. In the chamber on the right, that is, in the chamber of sacrifice, a blade of steel, covered with singular arabesques, was heating in a brazier of charcoal. On the altar lay the book of fate, and as the previous night had been very clear, Rene had been enabled to consult the stars.

Henry d'Anjou entered first. He had false hair, and his face and figure were concealed beneath a mask and large cloak. His mother followed him, and had she not been aware of his disguise, would not have recognized him. The queen took off her mask; D'Anjou, however, did not follow her example.

"Have you consulted the stars?" asked Catherine.

"I have, madame, and they have already informed me of the past. The person whose fate you desire to know has, like all persons born under Cancer, a fiery and ardent disposition; he is powerful, he has lived nearly a quarter of a century, Heaven has granted him wealth and power—is it not so, madame?"

"Perhaps."

"Have you his hair and blood?"

"Here they are."

And Catherine gave the magician a lock of fair hair and a small phial of blood.

Rene took the phial, shook it, and let fall on the glowing steel blade a large drop of blood that boiled for a second, and then spread itself into a thousand fantastic shapes.

"Oh!" cried Rene, "I see him convulsed with agony. Hark! how he groans—see, how all around him turns to blood—see how, around his death-bed, combats and wars arise; and see, here are the lances and swords!"

"Will this be long first?" asked Catherine, seizing the hand of her son, who, in his anxiety to see, had leaned over the brazier.

Rene approached the altar, and repeated a cabalistic prayer; then he rose, and announcing all was ready, took in one hand the phial and in the other the lock of hair, and bidding Catherine open at hazard the book of fate, he poured on the steel blade all the blood and cast the hair in the fire, pronouncing a mystic formula as he did so.

Instantly the Duke d'Anjou and Catherine saw on the blade a figure resembling a corpse wrapped in a winding-sheet.

Another figure, that of a woman, leaned over it.

At the same time, the hair burned, casting out one jet of flame like a fiery tongue.

"A year," cried Rene, "scarce a year, and this man shall die! One woman alone shall lament over him; and yet, no: at the end of the blade is another female, with an infant in her arms."

Catherine looked at her son, as if, though herself the mother of the man whose death was announced, she would ask him who these two women could be. But scarcely had Rene finished, when the forms disappeared. Then Catherine opened the book at hazard, and read, with a voice that trembled in spite of herself, the following distich:

"Ainsi a peri cil que l'on redoutoit,
Plutost, trop tost, si prudence n'etoit."

"And for him that you wot of," said Catherine, "what say the signs?"

"Favorable as ever; unless Providence interpose to thwart his destiny, he is sure to be fortunate, but—"

"But what?"

"One of the stars composing his pleiad was covered by a black cloud during my observations."

"Ah, a black cloud!—but there is some hope?"

"Of whom speak you, madame?" asked D'Anjou.

Catherine drew her son on one side, and spoke to him in a low voice.

During this interval, Rene, kneeling by the brazier, poured into the hollow of his hand the last drop of blood.

"Strange," murmured he. "It only proves how little can human knowledge compete with ours. To every one but me, even to Ambroise Pare, this blood, so pure, so full of health, promises years of life, and yet all will be useless ere a year expire."

Catherine and Henry turned and listened.

"Ah!" continued Rene, "to the uninitiated the present is manifest, but to us the future is also manifest."

"He will die, then, before the year be over?" said the queen-mother.

"As surely as there are three persons present who must one day repose in the grave."

"Yet you say the blood indicates a long life?"

"Yes, if things were to follow the natural course; but an accident—"

"Ah, yes," whispered Catherine to Henry; "an accident."

"The greater reason for staying."

"Oh, that is impossible."

Then, turning to Rene: "Thanks," said the young man, disguising the tone of his voice; "take this purse."

"Come, *count*," said Catherine, purposely using this title, to divert Rene's suspicions. And they left the chamber.

"Mother," cried Henry, "you hear? —an accident: should it happen, I shall be four hundred leagues away."

"Four hundred leagues may be accomplished in eight days."——"Yes; but who knows if they will suffer me to return."

"Who knows," replied the queen, "but this illness of the king's may be the accident of which Rene spoke. Go, Henry, go, and beware of irritating your brother, should you see him."

CHAPTER XLII.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

THE first thing the Duke d'Anjou learned on reaching the Louvre was, that the solemn entry of the ambassadors was fixed for the fifth day. The tailors and jewelers waited on the prince with magnificent dresses and superb ornaments which the king had ordered for him.

While he fitted them on in a state of anger that brought tears to his eyes, Henry of Navarre was amusing himself greatly with a splendid collar of emeralds, a gold-hilted sword, and a very valuable ring, which Charles had sent him that morning. D'Alencon had just received a letter, and had retired to his chamber, in order to read it at his leisure.

As to Coconnas, he was asking for his friend from every echo in the Louvre. At length, the rumor of the affair in the corridor began to be bruited about. Coconnas was in the utmost grief: for a moment he believed that all these kings and princes had killed his friend and thrown his body into some dungeon.

He learned that D'Alencon had been of the party, and overlooking the dignity that encompassed a prince of the blood, he went to him to demand an explanation with as little ceremony as if he had been a private gentleman.

D'Alencon, at first, was inclined to show the door to an impertinent who came to ask an account of his actions; but Coconnas spoke so sternly, his eyes glared with so much rage, and an adventure of three duels in less than twenty hours which he had had, placed the Piedmontese so high, that he paused, and instead of giving way to his first impulse, replied with a charming smile:

"My dear Coconnas, it is true that the king, furious at having received on his shoulder a silver ewer, the Duke d'Anjou, angry at having orange jam poured on his head, and the Duke de Guise, humiliated by having been assailed with a haunch of venison, combined to kill M. de la Mole; but a friend of your friend's averted the blow, and I assure you the enterprise failed."

"Ah," said Coconnas, breathing as loudly at this information as a smith's bellows; "ah, mordi! monseigneur, that is well; and I should like to know this friend, to prove my gratitude."

D'Alencon made no reply, but smiled more agreeably still, which made Coconnas believe that this friend was none other than the prince himself.

"Well, monseigneur," he continued, "since you have done so much as to tell me the commencement of this story, will you complete the obligation by relating to me the conclusion?"

D'Alencon shook his head.

"The worst of all," he said, "my brave Cocannas, is, that your friend disappeared without any one knowing whither."

"Mordi!" cried the Piedmontese, again turning pale with indignation; "but I will know where he is!"

"Go to the Queen Marguerite," said D'Alencon, who was as anxious as Coconnas to learn where De la Mole was; "she will know what has become of the friend you lament."

"I had already thought of doing so," replied Coconnas.

"Do so," added the prince; "only do not say it was by my advice; for if you are so imprudent, you may not obtain any information."

"Monseigneur," said Coconnas, "as your royal highness recommends me to secrecy on this point, I will be as mute as a tench, or the queen-mother. Good prince! excellent prince! magnanimous prince!" murmured Coconnas, as he went to the queen of Navarre.

Marguerite was awaiting Coconnas; for the noise of his despair had reached her, and she almost forgave him his somewhat coarse behavior to Madame de Nevers, whom the Piedmontese had not visited, in consequence of a dispute between them two or three days previously. He was therefore introduced to the queen as soon as announced.

Coconnas entered, not altogether able to surmount the embarrassment which he always felt to a certain extent in the presence of the queen, and which was the greater from her superiority of wit than of rank; but Marguerite greeted him with a smile which instantly reassured him.

"Ah, madame!" he exclaimed, "restore my friend to me, I entreat you; or, at least, tell me what has become of him; for without him I cannot live. Suppose Euryalus without Nisus, Damon without Pythias, or Orestes without Pylades, and have pity on my misfortune at the loss of my dear friend."

Marguerite smiled, and after having bound Coconnas to secrecy, told him all about the escape by the window. As to the place of his concealment, although Coconnas urged her to reveal it with all earnestness, she decidedly refused, but added:

"Well, if you wish to learn something decisive as to your friend, ask the king of Navarre, who is the only person that has a right to speak. As for me, all I can tell you is, that he you are seeking lives; have faith in my word!"

"I have faith in something still more sure, madame: those lovely eyes have not been weeping."

Then, thinking he could not add anything to this compliment, he retired, fully resolved to seek a reconciliation with Madame de Nevers, just to find if she knew more than Marguerite would tell him. The idea of leaving Marguerite had almost broken La Mole's heart, and it was rather to save the reputation of the queen than to preserve his own life that he had consented to fly. Thus the next evening he returned to Paris, to try and see Marguerite at her balcony. Marguerite, on her side, as if a secret voice had informed her that he would be there, had passed the evening at her window, and thus they had seen each other with happiness, a sentiment that may be readily imagined.

La Mole, anxious to be always near Marguerite, occupied himself in organizing, with all possible dispatch, the event which would restore her to him, namely, the flight of the king of Navarre.

Marguerite having thus seen La Mole, and being aware of his safety, was at ease with respect to him, but fearing he might be watched and followed, she pertinaciously refused to give him any other meeting than these *a l'Espagnole*, which took place every evening until the night before the reception of the ambassadors. On this evening, about nine o'clock, when all the persons in the Louvre were preoccupied with the preparations for next day, Marguerite opened her window and went into the balcony; but scarcely was she there, than the note she expected, according to La Mole's usual custom, was thrown with his usual skill, and fell at the feet of his royal mistress. As he had generally awaited her missive, Marguerite understood, that by anticipating her he had some important intelligence to communicate, and read it with all haste. The billet in the first page contained these words:

"MADAME—I must speak to the king of Navarre; it is on a most urgent matter. I am waiting."

And in the second page, which could be detached from the other, was written:

"MY LADY AND QUEEN—Manage that I may speak with you. I am waiting."

Marguerite had scarcely finished the

second side of this letter than she heard the voice of Henry of Navarre, who, with his usual reserve, tapped at the door, and asked Gillonne if he might be allowed to enter.

The queen instantly divided the sheet of paper, put one of the pages in her pocket, ran to the window, which she shut, and going quickly to the door, said: "Come in, sire."

Gently, quickly, and cleverly as Marguerite had closed the window, the sound had reached the ears of Henry, whose senses were always on the alert, and who had in the society he so greatly mistrusted acquired that exquisite delicacy of hearing and sight which man acquires in a savage state. But the king of Navarre was not one of those tyrants who wish to prevent their wives from taking the air and gazing on the stars. Henry was smiling and urbane as usual.

"Madame," he said, "while our people of the court are trying on their fine apparel, I have come to have a few words with you as to my affairs, which you still regard as your own, do you not?"

"Most assuredly, sir," replied Marguerite; "are not our interests always identical?"

"Yes, madame; and therefore I wished to ask your opinion as to the pains which D'Alencon has taken for several days to avoid me, so much so, that since the day before yesterday he has betaken himself to Saint-Germains. Do you not think from this that it is his intention either to go away alone, or not to go at all? Let me, if you please, have your ideas on this point; for it would have great weight with me if your opinion should coincide with mine."

"Your majesty is quite right to feel uneasy as to my brother's silence. I have thought of it all day; and it is my opinion that, circumstances having changed, he has changed with them."

"That is to say, that seeing King Charles ill, and the Duke D'Anjou king of Poland, he would not be sorry to remain in Paris to watch for the crown of France."

"Precisely so."

"I agree with you. This is all as I wish it," continued Henry. "Let him remain; that will not alter our plan; for I should require, to go alone, thrice the guarantees I should have asked had your brother accompanied me, whose name and presence in the enterprise would have been my safeguards. The only thing that astonishes me is, not having any tidings of De Mouy. Have you any intelligence of him, madame?"

"I, sire!" said Marguerite, astonished. "How could I possibly—"

"Eh, pardieu, ma mie! nothing can be more natural. You were so kind as to oblige me by saving young La Mole's life; he was sure to go to Mantes, and when there, it was no great distance to return hither."

"Ah! that gives me the solution to a riddle I have sought for in vain," replied Marguerite. "I had left my window open, and found on my return a kind of note on the carpet."

"There now!" said Henry.

"A note which at first I could not comprehend, and to which I attached no importance," continued Marguerite. "Perhaps I was wrong, and it comes from that quarter."

"Very possibly," said Henry; "nay, most probably. Might I see this note?"

"Certainly, sire," replied Marguerite, handing to the king the half sheet of paper which she had put in her pocket.

The king looked at it.

"Is not this," he inquired, "the writing of M. de la Mole?"

"I do not know," was Marguerite's reply; "the letters appear to me counterfeited."

"Never mind; let us read." And he read:

"'MADAME—I must speak to the king of Navarre. It is on a most urgent matter. I am waiting.'—Ah, do you see?" said Henry; "he says he is waiting!"

"Yes, I see he says so; but what then?"

"Why, ventre-saint-gris! I wish him to come here."

"Come here!" exclaimed Marguerite, fixing on her husband her beautiful eyes, full of amazement; "how can you say

such a thing, sire? A man whom the king has sought to kill—who is marked down, menaced. Let him come, do you say! Is that possible? Were doors made for those who have been—?"

"Obliged to escape by the window, you would say."

"Precisely so."

"Well, but if they know the way by the window, they may take that road again, since it is impossible for them to enter by the door. That is simple enough, surely."

"Do you think so?" said Marguerite, blushing with pleasure at the thoughts of again having La Mole near her.

"I am sure of it."

"But how can he ascend?" inquired the queen.

"Did you not preserve the rope-ladder I sent you?"

"Yes, sire," said Marguerite.

"Then the whole thing will be capitally managed. Fasten it to your balcony, and let it hang. If it be De Mouy who awaits—and I am induced to believe so—he will mount the ladder." And without losing his gravity, Henry took the taper to light Marguerite in her search for the ladder. The search was by no means tedious; it was discovered in a cupborad in the celebrated closet.

"Here it is," said Henry. "And now, madame, if it is not too much to ask of your complaisance, tie it, I beg, to the balcony."

"Why me and not you, sire?" asked Marguerite..

"Because the best conspirators are the most prudent; the sight of a man might alarm your correspondent—you understand?"

Marguerite smiled, and fastened the ladder.

"There," said Henry, ensconcing himself in the angle of the apartment; "now show yourself—and now let the ladder be dropped. Capital! I am sure De Mouy will come up."

And in a few minutes afterward, a man joyously placed his leg over the balcony; but seeing that the queen did not approach him, remained for some minutes in hesitation, and then Henry advanced.

"Ah!" said he, urbanely, "it is not De Mouy; it is M. de la Mole. Good-evening, M. de la Mole. Enter, I entreat you."

La Mole was for a moment amazed. Perchance, had he still been on the ladder, instead of having his feet firmly in the balcony, he would have fallen backward.

"You desired to speak to the king of Navarre on an urgent affair," said Marguerite; "I have informed him so, and here he is."

Henry went to the window and closed it.

"I love thee!" whispered Marguerite, pressing the young man's hand ardently.

"Well, sir," said Henry, handing a chair to La Mole, "what have we to say?"

"We have to say, sire," he replied, "that I have left M. de Mouy at the barrier. He desires to know if Maurevel has spoken, and if his presence in your majesty's chamber is known."

"Not yet; but it must be before long. We must therefore make haste."

"His opinion coincides with your majesty's, sire; and if to-morrow, during the evening, M. d'Alencon is ready to depart, De Mouy will be at the Porte Saint-Marcel with a hundred and fifty men; five hundred will await you at Fontainebleau, and then you will gain Blois, Angoulême, and Bordeaux."

"Madame," said Henry, turning to his wife, "to-morrow, I shall be ready: shall you?"

La Mole's eyes were fixed on Marguerite's with intense anxiety.

"You have my word," replied the queen. "Whithersoever you go, I follow you; but you know M. d'Alencon must go at the same time. There is no middle path for him; he is with us, or he betrays us; if he hesitates, we will not stir."

"Does he know anything of this proposed plan, M. de la Mole?" inquired Henry.

"He had a letter from De Mouy several days since."

"Ah, ah!" said Henry, "and never told me a word of it."

"Be on your guard, sir—be on your guard," said Marguerite.

"Be easy; I am on my guard. But how to return an answer to De Mouy?"

"Do not be under any anxiety, sire. To-morrow, on the right hand or left hand of your majesty, visible or invisible, during the reception of the ambassadors, he will be there; one word in the queen's address will make him understand whether you consent or not; whether he should flee, or await you. If the Duke d'Alencon refuses, he only requires a delay of a fortnight to reorganize everything in your name."

"Really," replied Henry, "De Mouy is an invaluable man. Can you introduce a phrase or two in your discourse, madame?"

"Nothing easier," replied Marguerite.

"Well, then," said Henry, "I shall see M. d'Alencon to-morrow; let De Mouy be at his post, and understand from half a word."

"He will be there, sire."

"Well, then, M. de la Mole, go and bear him my reply. You have, doubtless, a horse and servant somewhere near at hand."

"Orthon awaits me on the quay."

"Go to him, comte. Oh, not by the window; that is very well on extreme occasions; but you might be seen, and as it would not be known that it was for me that you exposed yourself, it would compromise the queen."

"But how then, sire?"

"If you could not enter the Louvre alone, you can at least go out of it with me who have the password. You have your cloak, I have mine; we will wrap ourselves up well, and shall pass the wicket without difficulty. Wait here while I see if the corridors are free."

Henry, with the most natural air in the world, went out to examine if the way was clear. La Mole remained alone with the queen.

"Oh, when shall we meet again?" said La Mole.

"To-morrow evening, if we flee; in the Rue Cloche-Percée, if we do not flee."

"M. de la Mole," said Henry, returning, "you may come; there is no one there."

La Mole bowed respectfully before the queen.

"Give him your hand to kiss, madame," said Henry; "M. De la Mole is no common servitor."

Marguerite obeyed.

"Apropos," added Henry. "Put away the rope-ladder carefully: it is a very precious instrument for conspirators, and at the moment we least think of, it may stand in stead. Come, De la Mole—come!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE AMBASSADORS.

NEXT morning, the whole population of Paris poured toward the Faubourg St. Antoine, by which it was decided that the Polish ambassadors should enter; a line of soldiers restrained the crowd, and a regiment of horse escorted the nobles and ladies of the court.

Soon appeared, close by the Abbey St. Antoine, a troop of cavaliers dressed in red and yellow, with furred mantles and caps, and bearing large sabers curved like Turkish scimetars. Behind this troop came a second, clothed with Oriental magnificence. They preceded the ambassadors, who, four in number, gorgeously sustained the reputation of their chivalrous country.

One of the ambassadors was the bishop of Cracow; his costume was half ecclesiastical, half military, resplendent with gold and jewels. Next the bishop rode the palatine Lasco, a powerful noble, nearly related to the royal family, rich as a king, and as proud. Behind these two principal ambassadors, who were accompanied by two other palatines of high rank, came a number of gentlemen, whose steeds, all glittering with gold and precious stones, excited the clamorous admiration of the populace.

Up to the last moment Catherine had hoped the reception would be deferred in consequence of the king's illness. But when the day arrived—when she saw Charles, pale as a specter, assume the royal robes, she saw she must, in appearance at least, yield to his iron will, and

began to believe that the safest plan for Henry d'Anjou was to depart into the splendid exile to which he was condemned.

The large reception chamber had been prepared, and as such ceremonies were usually public, the guards and sentinels had received orders to admit as many persons into the apartments and courts as they could possibly contain.

As for Paris, it presented the same aspect that every great city presents on similar occasions—that is, confusion and curiosity; only, had any one attentively examined the population, he would have remarked a considerable number of men in cloaks, who exchanged glances and signs when at a distance, and, when they met, a few rapid words in a low tone. They seemed much occupied with the procession, and received their orders from an old man, whose keen black eyes, spite of his long white beard and eyebrows, bespoke a vigorous activity. This old man, by his own and his followers' assistance, gained an entrance to the Louvre, and, thanks to the officer of the Swiss guard, obtained a place behind the ambassadors, and opposite Henry and Marguerite.

Henry, informed by La Mole that De Mouy in some disguise would be present, looked round on every side. At last his eyes encountered those of the old man, and a sign from De Mouy dissipated all doubt as to his identity; for De Mouy was so perfectly disguised, that the king of Navarre was doubtful as to whether this old man with a white beard could be the intrepid Huguenot chief, who a few days before had made so desperate a defense.

A word from Henry fixed Marguerite's attention on De Mouy. Then her eyes wandered round the chamber in search of La Mole. La Mole was not there.

The orations commenced. The first was to the king: Lasco, in the name of the Diet of Poland, demanded his consent to the Duke d'Anjou becoming their king.

The king's reply was brief and precise. He presented to them the Duke d'Anjou, of whose courage he made a high eulogium. He spoke in French, and an interpreter translated what he said at the end of each sentence.

While the interpreter was speaking, the king applied his handkerchief continually to his mouth, and as often as he removed it a stain of blood was visible.

When Charles had finished, Lasco turned to D'Anjou, and offered him, in the name of the Diet, the throne of Poland. Lasco's address was in Latin.

The duke replied in the same language, and in a voice he in vain strove to render firm, that he gratefully accepted the honor offered to him. During all this time Charles, who remained standing, with lips compressed, fixed his eyes on him, like an eagle watching his prey.

When the duke had finished, Lasco took the crown of the Jagellons from the velvet cushion on which it rested, and while two Polish nobles placed the royal robes on the duke, deposited the crown in Charles's hands.

Charles signed to his brother. D'Anjou knelt before him, and, with his own hands, Charles placed the crown on his head, and the two brothers interchanged a kiss full of bitter hate.

A herald then cried:

"Alexander Edward Henry of France, duke d'Anjou, is crowned king of Poland. God save the king of Poland!"

All the assembly repeated: "God save the king of Poland!"

Then Lasco turned to Marguerite. Her discourse had been reserved till the last, and, as we have said, Marguerite had composed it herself.

Lasco's address was rather a eulogy than an oration. He had yielded, Sarmatian as he was, to his admiration of Marguerite's beauty; and while his language was that of Ovid, his style was that of Ronsard. His discourse was applauded by everybody: by those who understood Latin, because they partook of his admiration; by those who did not understand it, because they wished it to appear as though they did.

Marguerite, having made a gracious curtsey to the ambassador, fixed her eyes on De Mouy, and began thus:

"Quod nunc hâc in aulâ insperati adestis exultaremus ego et rex conjux, nisi idèo immineret calamitas, scilicet non solum fratris sed etiam amici orbitas."—("Your unlooked-for presence in this court would overwhelm my husband and myself with joy, did it not threaten us with a great misfortune; that is, not only the loss of a brother, but also that of a friend.")

These words had a double meaning, and while intended for De Mouy, were supposed to refer to the Duke d'Anjou. The latter, accordingly, bowed in token of gratitude.

Charles did not recollect having read this sentence in Marguerite's speech, when submitted to him some days before, but he did not trouble himself much about that; and, besides, he understood Latin very imperfectly. Marguerite continued:

"Adèo dolemur a te dividi ut tecum proficisci maluissemus, sed idem fatum quo nunc sine ullâ morâ Lutetiâ cedere juberis, hâc in urbe detinet. Proficiscere ergo, frater; proficiscere amice; proficiscere sine nobis; proficiscentem, sequentur spes et desideria nostra."—("We are grieved to be separated from you, for we should have preferred going with you; but the same fate that compels you to quit Paris without delay, retains us in that city. Go, dear brother; go, then, dear friend—go without us. Our hopes and our wishes will follow you.")

It is easy to understand how attentively De Mouy had listened to these words, which, though addressed to the Duke d'Anjou, were meant for him alone. While listening, Catherine was struck with the black eyes so piercing beneath their gray pent-houses.

"What a strange face!" thought she. "Who can this man be who watches Marguerite so attentively, and whom Henry and Marguerite, on their part, look at with such earnestness?"

The queen of Navarre continued, while Catherine strove in vain to divine the name of this strange old man, when the master of the ceremonies came behind her, and presented to her a little satin bag; she opened it, and found a paper containing these words: "Maurevel, by the aid of a cordial I have administered to him, has, in some measure, recovered his strength, and has written the name of the man in the king of Navarre's chamber. This man was M. de Mouy."

"De Mouy," thought the queen, "I fancied it was he; but this old man—eh, cospetto!—this old man is—"

She leaned toward the captain of her guards.

"Do you see," whispered she, "that old man with the white beard, and in the black velvet dress, behind Lasco?"

"He to whom the king of Navarre made a sign?"

"Yes; do not lose sight of him; station yourself at the door with ten men, and when he comes out, invite him, in the king's name, to dinner; if he accept, conduct him to the chamber, and keep him there; if he resist, seize him, dead or alive."

Fortunately, Henry had glanced at Catherine, and observing her eyes fixed so earnestly on De Mouy, became uneasy; when he saw her give an order to the captain of the guard, he guessed all. It was then he made the sign De Nancey had observed, and which meant, "Save yourself—you are discovered!" But Henry was not quite reassured until De Nancey returned, and he saw by Catherine's face that the officer had been unsuccessful.

The audience was finished. The king rose with difficulty, saluted the ambassadors, and retired, leaning on Ambroise Pare, who, since his accident, had not quitted him an instant. The Duke d'Alencon had been a mere nobody throughout the ceremony; and Charles's eyes, which had been fixed on D'Anjou, had not once been turned toward him.

The new king of Poland felt himself lost. Carried off by those barbarians, far from his mother, he was, so to speak, a second Antæus, removed from the earth to which he owed his strength. Instead of following the king, he retired to his mother's apartments. On seeing her beloved son pale beneath the crown, and bending beneath the royal mantle, Catherine advanced toward him.

"Oh, mother!" cried the king, "I am condemned to die an exile."

"My son," returned Catherine, "have you so soon forgotten Rene's prediction? Tranquilize yourself; you will not be there long."

"Mother, I entreat you," said the Duke d'Anjou, "on the least probability of the crown of France being vacant, inform me."

"My son," replied the queen, "until the day we both of us await, a horse shall be always saddled in my stable, and a courier ever in my antechamber ready to set out for Poland."

CHAPTER XLIV.

ORESTES AND PYLADES.

HENRY D'ANJOU once departed, peace and happiness seemed to have returned to the Louvre. Charles, laying aside his melancholy, resumed his usually fine and vigorous health, either hunting each day with Henry, or, if prevented from following that sport, passing the time in discussing subjects relating to it, and scolding his brother-in-law for the indifference he betrayed for hawking, declaring that he would be the most accomplished prince of his time, if he did but understand the management of falcons, gerfalcons, hawks, and tiercelets, as perfectly as he did brocks and hounds. Catherine had returned to all the duties of a good mother. Kind and gentle toward Charles and D'Alencon —affectionate to Henry and Marguerite—gracious to Madame de Nevers and Madame de Sauve, she even carried her amiability so far as to visit Maurevel twice during the time he lay ill in his residence, situated Rue de la Cerisaie—alleging, as a reason for this condescension on her part, that the unfortunate object of her pity had been wounded while in the discharge of orders received from herself. Marguerite followed up her love affairs after the Italian mode of conducting such matters. Each evening she stood at her open window, and, both by writing and gestures, kept up a continual correspondence with La Mole; while, in each of his letters the impatient young man reminded his lovely mistress of her promise to see him in the Rue Cloche-Percée.

In a word, there remained but one lonely and discontented person amid the various members of the now calm and tranquil Louvre.

It was certainly something to know that La Mole still lived—much to be the object of decided preference to so charming and capricious a person as Madame de Nevers; but the Piedmontese would thankfully have surrendered all the tender meetings granted him by the duchess, as well as all the consolatory assurances of Marguerite touching the safety of their common friend, for one hour's enjoyment of his dear La Mole's company.

Urged by the wishes of her own heart, as well as by the supplications of La Mole, and the deep despair of the woebegone Coconnas, Marguerite had appointed to meet Henriette at the house with the double entrance, and endeavor there to discuss, fully and uninterruptedly, those subjects all four had so much at heart.

Coconnas received Henriette's summons to be in the Rue Tizon at half-past nine with a very ill grace. Nevertheless, he was punctual to the assignation, where he found Henriette already arrived, and not a little offended at being there first.

"Fie, monsieur!" cried she, as he entered, "is this well, to make—I will not say a princess, but a lady—wait for you?"

"Wait?" replied Coconnas. "I like that! I'll wager you what you like, that we are before our time."

"I was here certainly before the time fixed."

"Well, and so was I, or, at least, I should have been, but for a circumstance. What's o'clock now? Scarcely ten, I think."

"And my letter named half-past nine as the hour you were to meet me here."

"For the purpose of being punctual, I quitted the Louvre at nine o'clock to repair hither; but when I reached the corner of the Rue de Grenelle, I perceived a person whom I mistook for La Mole."

"Always something tedious about that La Mole!"

"Certainly, either with your leave or without it."

"Brute!"

"Upon my word," said Coconnas, "we seem bent upon paying each other compliments to-night."

"You are really overpoweringly civil, it must be confessed; but go on with your story, if it must be so, and let me hear what became of your meeting with the individual so like your dear La Mole. But stay! for Heaven's sake, how comes this blood upon your doublet?"

"Ah, that fellow must have sprinkled me when we were fighting together."

"Have you, then, fought any one?"

"To be sure I have."

"And still on La Mole's account."

"For whom do you think I should fight? For a woman? No, no; I will tell you all about it. I followed the person who had dared to take upon himself to imitate the walk and manner of my friend, and overtook him in the Rue Coquillière. I eyed him in every way, by the light from a shop window—well, it was not my poor La Mole!"

"So far, so good!"

"Ay, but my unknown gentleman turned quite angry about my following him; and when I said, 'Sir, you are an ass and a fool to take upon yourself to bear a distant resemblance to my friend M. de la Mole, who is an accomplished cavalier, while it only requires a nearer view of you to perceive you are only a vulgarian!' he drew his sword—I did the same; and at the third pass, my angry gallant fell senseless at my feet, sprinkling me with his blood in falling."

"And did you not afford him any succor?"

"Just as I was about to do so, another cavalier, but mounted on horseback, came by. Well, this time, duchesse, I thought I was quite sure of finding La Mole, for he resembled him even more than the preceding—he was going a great pace, but that did not deter me from running after him as hard as I could; but I was obliged to stop to get a little breath, and, in the meantime, the horseman disappeared; and, tired and dispirited with having had so unsuccessful a chase, I determined to come here!"

"Upon my word," said the duchess, "your conduct is most flattering! it is quite easy to perceive you no longer love me."

"On the contrary, duchesse, I idolize you; but you do not understand the thing. Is it not quite possible for me to love and cherish and dote upon you, and yet employ my spare time in eulogizing my friend!"

"You call the moments passed with me spare time!"

"I can't help it: that poor De la Mole is forever in my thoughts!"

"And you prefer him to me! I see, I know you do! Annibal, I hate and detest you—there!—now I've said it. Why not deal candidly with me, and tell me you prefer this friend to me—only one thing I warn you—that if you dare to prefer any creature in the world to me, I'll—I'll—"

"Henriette, most lovely duchesse! let me advise you, for the sake of your own tranquillity, not to ask unwise questions—be satisfied that I love you, best of women; but you must also permit me the privilege of loving La Mole above all other men."

"Well answered!" said a strange voice, suddenly, and a large damask curtain being raised, discovered a panel, which, sliding back into the wall, and forming a mode of communication between the two apartments, discovered La Mole standing in the doorway, like one of Titian's splendid paintings set in a gilded frame.

"La Mole!" exclaimed Coconnas, without taking the slightest notice of Marguerite, or in any way thanking her for the delightful surprise she had arranged for him; "La Mole! my friend! my dear, dear friend!"

So saying, he threw himself into his friend's arms, knocking over the table that stood in his way, as well as the arm-chair he had been sitting in.

La Mole returned his greetings with equal warmth; then, addressing the Duchesse de Nevers: "You must pardon me, madame, if the mention of my name has been allowed to disturb your happiness; all I can say," continued he, regarding Marguerite with ineffable tender-

ness, "is, that it has not been my fault that we have not seen each other before this."

"You see, Henriette," said Marguerite, taking up the conversation, "I have kept my word; here he is!"

Meanwhile, Coconnas, after having embraced his friend, and walked round and round him a dozen times; after even holding a candelabra to his face, the better to gaze on his beloved features, suddenly turned toward Marguerite, and kneeling down reverentially, kissed the hem of her robe.

"Well, well!" said the Duchess de Nevers, "you seem to forget that I am present; I suppose I have grown quite unendurable in your eyes."

"Mordi!" replied Coconnas, "you are, as you ever have been, the goddess of my idolatry: the only difference being, that I can now tell you so with a lighter heart; and were a host of savage nations standing by, I would insist and maintain that all their hyperborean and barbarous countries together could produce nothing so perfect, so lovely, as you, my queen of beauty."

"Gently, gently, Coconnas," interposed La Mole; "do you forget that Madame Marguerite is here?"

"That makes no difference," answered Coconnas, with that half-serious, half-comic air and manner so peculiarly his own; "I will still assert that Madame Henriette is the queen of beauty, while Madame Marguerite is a beauty of a queen!"

"Come, then, my beautiful queen!" said Madame de Nevers, perceiving that Coconnas had neither eyes nor ears for any one but La Mole, "let us leave these tender friends to have an hour's chat together. M. Coconnas will perhaps be a little more rational after that."

Marguerite whispered a few words to La Mole, and then, with Madame de Nevers, passed through the open panel to the next room, where supper was awaiting them.

The two young men were then left alone.

The first questions asked by Coconnas were touching that fatal evening, which had wellnigh cost him his life. In proportion as La Mole proceeded in his narration, the Piedmontese shook with intense emotion.

"And why?" inquired he, "instead of running about half wild as you have done, and causing me the uneasiness you have done, did you not seek refuge with our master the duke, who would have received and protected you?"

"Do you mean the Duke d'Alencon?" whispered La Mole, "when you say *our* master? 'Tis to the king of Navarre I owe my life."

"Excellent, noble king! but what part did the Duke d'Alencon play in the affair?"——"Oh, he held the cord with which I was to be strangled."

"Mordi!" exclaimed Coconnas, springing up with violent energy; "are you sure of that? What! a pale-faced, sickly-looking prince, a currish mongrel, dare to lay his hands on my friend!—Strangle him, indeed! ha ha! mordi! by to-morrow he shall hear my opinion on the subject."

"Are you mad, Coconnas? For Heaven's sake, calm yourself, and endeavor to recollect that it is half-past eleven o'clock, and that you are in waiting to-night at the Louvre."

"What care I for that? Good! he may wait long ere he has my attendance. What, do you suppose I will ever again serve a man who has held a cord to murder my friend with? You are jesting! No, no, the hand of Providence has reunited us, and from you I go no more. If you stay here, I remain also."

"For the love of Heaven, Coconnas, mind what you are about. You are sober, I trust?"

"Luckily I am, or I should most certainly set the Louvre on fire."

"Come, come, Annibal," persisted La Mole, "act like a reasonable being; return to your duties, or inform the duke that you quit his service."

"To be sure, to be sure; that is quite the right thing, and I will do it. I'll write him a few lines directly."

"Write, Conconnas! you make light work of writing to a prince of the blood."

"Ah, but whose blood — that of my friend? Have a care!" exclaimed Coconnas, rolling his large fierce-looking eyes; "I may yet be tempted to break through etiquette beyond the mere sending of a written notice to quit his service."

So saying, Coconnas took the pen without further opposition from his friend, and hastily composed the following specimen of epistolary eloquence:

"My Lord—There can be no doubt but that a person versed as is your highness in the writings of all authors of classical antiquity, must be perfectly well acquainted with the touching story of Orestes and Pylades, two heroes celebrated alike for their misfortunes and deep friendship. My friend La Mole is equally unfortunate as was Orestes, while I can boast of the same devoted attachment as that which possessed Pylades. Affairs of the utmost importance to him demand my aid and assistance at this particular moment, and render it quite impossible for me to quit him. I am therefore compelled (craving your highness's pardon for the same) to take a holiday, for the purpose of remaining with the dear friend I mean to part from no more, but to follow his fortune whithersoever it may lead me.

"I beg your highness to believe the deep sorrow it causes me to withdraw myself from your service, as also the deep respect with which I subscribe myself, my lord,

"Your highness's

"Most humble and obedient servant,

"Annibal, Comte de Coconnas,

"And the inseparable friend of M. de la Mole."

This chef-d'œuvre terminated, Coconnas read it aloud to La Mole, who merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Coconnas, who either had not seen his friend's gesture, or feigned not to have done so.

"Why, I say that M. d'Alencon will laugh at us both, as a pair of simpletons."

"Better do that than strangle us. Now, then, I will speak to our host to get my letter dispatched to the Louvre."

At this moment the panel was slid back.

"Well," inquired both princesses in the same breath; "and how are Pylades and Orestes, by this time?"

"Mordi! madame!" replied Coconnas, "they are both dying with love and hunger."

It was Maitre la Huriere himself, who, at nine o'clock the following morning, carried to the Louvre the respectful missive of Comte Annibal de Coconnas.

CHAPTER XLV.

ORTHON.

Henry of Navarre, after the refusal of the Duke d'Alencon, which left everything undecided and in peril, even his very existence, had become, if possible, more intimate with the prince than he had been before: from which circumstance Catherine concluded that not only did the two princes understand each other perfectly well, but also that they were engaged in some mutual plot or conspiracy.

She questioned Marguerite on the subject, but Marguerite was worthy of her mother; and so skillfully did the queen of Navarre parry her mother's inquisitorial inquiries, that although replying with apparent openness and candor to each, she contrived to throw a still greater mystery over the affair than it was before involved in.

The Florentine had thus no guide through the labyrinth of her thoughts but the spirit of intrigue she had brought with her from Tuscany; and the first conclusion she came to was, that as the hated Béarnais derived the principal part of his strength from his alliance with the Duke d'Alencon, it would be expedient to separate them as speedily as possible.

From the instant in which she formed this resolution, Catherine continued to beset her son with a patience and ability worthy of the most indefatigable angler, who, having dropped his bait near the prey he desires to secure, insensibly draws it ashore, till his victim is unconsciously lured into his power.

Duke Francois was conscious of the increased affection shown him by his mother, whose advances he received with every manifestation of pleasure. As for Henry, he affected to know nothing of what was going on, but he kept a more watchful eye on his ally than he had hitherto done.

Everybody seemed to wait some great event by which to shape their course. During this state of things it was, that one fine summer day, when the sun had risen with even more than wonted splendor, and the rich balmy air was filled with the odor of a thousand flowers, a pale and sickly-looking man came forth from a small house situated behind the Arsenal, and feebly dragged his way, supporting himself by a staff, toward the Rue de Petit-Musc.

Having reached the Porte St. Antoine, he diverged from the Boulevard and entered the Archery Garden: the man who kept the gate receiving him with every demonstration of respect.

No person was in the garden (which, as its name expressed, belonged to a society called the Toxophilites), but had there been ever so many spectators, the pale stranger would have well merited their commiseration and sympathy; for his long mustache and military air and step, though somewhat weakened by sickness and suffering, sufficiently indicated that he was some officer recently wounded, and now seeking to regain his strength by essaying to take exercise in the open air. Yet strange to say, when the cloak with which (spite of the increasing warmth) the apparently harmless visitant was clad flew open, it displayed a pair of long pistols hanging to the silver clasps of his belt, which also sustained a dagger and a sword of colossal size, the latter of which hung heavily at his side, and, with its ponderous sheath, clattered against his shrunken and trembling legs.

Arrived in the garden, the individual selected for his resting-place a sort of small covered arbor looking on to the Boulevards, from which it was only separated by a thick hedge and by a small ditch, which formed as it were a second inclosure. Extending his weary limbs on a turfy bank, within reach of a table, he beckoned the porter, who, in addition to the duties of concierge, exercised also the vocation of a vintner, and saying a few words, was quickly supplied with what appeared to be a species of cordial.

The invalid had been about ten minutes in his shady retreat, slowly discussing the draught brought to him by the concierge, when suddenly his countenance, spite of its interesting pallor, assumed a fearful expression. He had just detected the approach of a cavalier, who, turning quickly round the corner of a street, advanced, wrapped in a large cloak, and stopped just before his eyes. Scarcely had the pale stranger in the arbor (who was no other than Maurevel) a little recovered from the agitation occasioned by the unexpected presence of the cavalier, than he observed that the latter was joined by a second person, dressed in the garb of a page.

Concealed beneath his leafy bower, Maurevel could see and hear all that passed in a conversation, the importance of which may be imagined, when it is known that the cavalier in the cloak was De Mouy, and the young man Orthon the page.

Both looked carefully around them, while Maurevel held his breath, lest a sound should escape him.

"You may speak now in safety," said the younger and more confident of the two; "we are quite secure here; none can either see or hear us."

"'Tis well!" answered De Mouy. "Now attend! you are to go to Madame de Sauve's, and should she be at home, give this into her own hands; but if she be not in her apartments, then place the letter where the king is accustomed to deposit his—behind the mirror. Wait at the Louvre; and if any reply is sent, bring it, you know where. Should you not be charged with an answer, then meet me to-night, with a petronel, at the spot I pointed out to you, and which I have just left."——"Enough!" said Orthon; "I understand."

"I must now leave you," continued De Mouy: "I have much to do during

the day. It will be useless for you to go to the Louvre till *he* is there; and I have every reason to believe *he* will be engaged all day studying hawking; so be gone, my boy, and execute your bidding: fear not to show yourself at the Louvre; you can say that, being now quite recovered, you come to thank Madame de Sauve for the kind care she took of you during your illness."

Maurevel, with fixed gaze, continued to listen till the perspiration gathered in large drops on his forehead. His first impulse had been to detach one of the pistols from his belt, and take deadly aim at De Mouy, but at that instant the sudden opening of the latter's cloak displayed a cuirass firm and solid enough to resist all such futile attempts.

Then, again, he reflected, that merely separated by so slight a barrier, one spring would bring De Mouy on him; and what chance could a poor wounded, enfeebled being like himself have with so powerful an assailant? — with a sigh, therefore, he drew back the weapon, mentally exclaiming:

"How unfortunate that I cannot stretch him dead on the spot, without any other witness than that young varlet, who would have served as a capital mark for my second pistol!"

Then, on the other hand, it occurred to him that the billet sent by the page to Madame de Sauve might probably be better worth taking than the life of the Huguenot chief.

"Well," said he, "be it so, then: you escape me this morning, but to-morrow I will settle all scores with you, if I pursue you to that hell from which you have sprung to ruin *me*, unless I first destroy *you!*"

At this instant, De Mouy, folding his cloak around him, and concealing his features in its large folds, departed in the direction of the Temple, while Orthon took the road that conducted to the banks of the river.

Then Maurevel, rising with more of energy and vigor than he had ventured to reckon on, regained the Rue de la Cerisaie, caused a horse to be saddled, and, weak as he was, and at the risk of again opening his newly-closed wounds, he set off at full gallop toward the Rue Saint Antoine, reached the quays, and darted into the Louvre.

Five minutes after he had passed the wicket, Catherine was in full possession of all that had transpired, and Maurevel had received the thousand golden crowns promised him for the arrest of the king of Navarre.

"Yes — yes!" exclaimed Catherine, exultingly, "either I am much deceived, or De Mouy will turn out the black spot discovered by Rene in the horoscope of this detested Béarnais."

A quarter of an hour after De Maurevel, Orthon reached the Louvre, and having fearlessly shown himself, as directed by De Mouy, proceeded, unmolested, to the apartments of Madame de Sauve, where he found only Dariole, who informed him that her lady was occupied, by the queen's orders, in transcribing letters for her majesty, who had summoned her for that purpose within the last five minutes.

"It does not signify," replied Orthon; "I can wait." Then, profiting by the freedom he had always been permitted to observe, he went into the adjoining chamber, which was the sleeping-room of the baroness; and after assuring himself that he was unobserved, carefully deposited the billet behind the looking-glass. Just as he was withdrawing his hand from the mirror, Catherine entered the room. Orthon changed color, for he fancied the quick, searching glance of the queen-mother was first directed to the glass.

"What are you doing here, my little fellow?" asked Catherine; "seeking for Madame de Sauve, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed, your majesty; it is a long time since I saw her, and if I delay returning her my grateful thanks, I fear she will think me ungrateful."

"You love Madame de Sauve, then, very much, do you not?"

"Oh, that I do, with all my heart! I can never forget the kindness Madame de Sauve condescended to bestow on a humble servitor like myself."

"And upon what occasion was it that she showed you all this care and attention?" inquired Catherine, feigning to be ignorant of what had befallen the youth.

"When I was wounded, madame, the night that they tried to arrest the king of Navarre. I was so terrified at the sight of the soldiers that I called out for help, upon which one of them gave me a blow on the head, and I fell senseless to the ground."

"Poor child! and you are now quite recovered?"

"Oh, quite, madame!"

"And that being the case," continued Catherine, "I suppose you are trying to get back into the service of the king of Navarre?"

"No, indeed, madame; when the king of Navarre learned that I had presumed to resist your majesty's orders, he dismissed me in heavy displeasure."

"Really!" said Catherine, with a tone expressive of the deepest interest. "Well, I will take the arrangement of that affair into my own hands; but if you are looking for Madame de Sauve, you will do so in vain; she is at this moment busily occupied in my apartments, and likely to be detained much longer over her employment."

Then, thinking that Orthon might not have had time to place his billet behind the glass previous to her entrance, she returned to the adjoining chamber, in order to afford the requisite opportunity for his so doing.

But just as Orthon, uneasy at the unexpected arrival of the queen-mother, was asking himself whether the circumstance did not in some way forebode evil to his master, he heard three gentle taps against the ceiling, the very signal he was in the habit of using to warn his master of the approach of danger during his visits to Madame de Sauve. He started at the sound: a sudden light seemed to break in upon his mind, and he appropriated the warning to himself—danger was near, doubtless; and hastily springing toward the mirror, he withdrew the paper he had previously placed there.

Through a rent in the tapestried hangings Catherine watched every movement of the youth; she saw him dart forward to the mirror, but whether to take away or to conceal the coveted paper, she could not detect. Returning to the apartment, with a smiling countenance, she said:

"What, here still, my little man? What can you be waiting for?—did I not promise to take charge of your future prospects? Do you doubt my word?"

"Heaven forfend, madame!" replied Orthon, bowing low; then kneeling before the queen, he kissed the hem of her robe, and hastily quitted the room. As he went out, he observed the captain of the guards, waiting the orders of Catherine, in the antechamber. This was far from calming his apprehensions; on the contrary, it increased the vague terror under which he already labored.

Immediately the folds of the massy curtain which hung before the door had closed on the form of Orthon, Catherine darted into the chamber, where she expected to find the so-ardently-desired billet; but vainly did she thrust her eager hand behind the mirror; no paper of any kind was there. Again she shook the solid frame, tapped against the glass, looked diligently around, to see if aught had fallen. All her impatient research availed not—no letter could she find. Yet her eyes had not deceived her: she had distinctly seen the youth approach the mirror; but doubtless the action she witnessed was to repossess himself of his deposit—not to place his billet.

"Unhappy boy!" cried she; "what evil destiny urged you thus to attempt to measure strength with me. I had rather not have been your enemy, as I now must be. Ho! there, M. de Nancey!"

The sonorous voice of the queen traversed the salon, and penetrated even to the anteroom, where M. de Nancey awaited her orders.

At the sound of his name, thus pronounced, the captain of the guards lost not an instant in obeying the summons.

"What is your majesty's pleasure?" said he, on entering.

"Did you but now observe a youth—nay, a mere child—go hence?"

"I did, madame."

"Call him back."

"By what name shall I address him?"

"By that of Orthon. Should he refuse to return, bring him back by force, but do not alarm him, if he comes unresistingly. I must speak with him directly."

The captain of the guards rushed out to obey the queen.

Orthon had scarcely got half way downstairs, when he heard himself called, and a cold shudder seized him, for he guessed who had sent for him.

His first impulse was to fly, but with an accuracy of judgment above his years, he quickly perceived that flight would be certain ruin. He therefore stopped, and inquired: "Who calls me?"

"I do—M. de Nancey," replied the captain of the guards, hurriedly descending the stairs.

"But I am in a very great hurry, and cannot stay," replied Orthon.

"By order of her majesty the queen-mother, I command you to accompany me back."

The terrified boy wiped the perspiration from his brow, and followed M. de Nancey back to the apartments of Madame de Sauve.

As Orthon entered the apartment where the queen-mother awaited, he trembled, and a deathly paleness came over him. The poor boy was as yet too young to exercise a more practiced control over himself. "Your majesty," said he, with a palpitating heart, "has done me the honor to recall me—may I presume to inquire for what purpose?"

"Child!" answered Catherine, with a bright and encouraging smile, "your countenance pleases me, and having promised to interest myself in your welfare, I am desirous of so doing without any delay; but first tell me, are you able to ride well?"

"Oh, yes, madame!"

"'Tis well; then come to me in my closet, and I will give you a message to carry to St. Germains."

"I am at your majesty's commands."

"Then order a horse to be prepared, M. de Nancey."

The captain of the guards disappeared on his errand.

"Now then, boy!" said Catherine, leading the way and signing for Orthon to follow her.

The queen-mother descended a floor, then entered the corridor in which were situated the apartments of the Duke d'Alencon and the king, reached the winding staircase, again descended a flight of stairs, and opened a door leading to a circular gallery, of which none but the king and herself possessed the key, made Orthon pass first; then, entering after him, carefully locked the door. This gallery formed a sort of rampart round a portion of the apartments occupied by the king and queen-mother, and resembled the corridor of the Castle of St. Angelo, at Rome, or that of the Pitti Palace at Florence, destined to serve as a place of refuge in case of danger.

The door secured, Catherine and her companion found themselves inclosed in a dark corridor. Each advanced a few steps; the queen leading the way and the page following, when suddenly Catherine turned round, and Orthon perceived on her countenance the same gloomy expression it had worn a few minutes previously. Her eyes, of the shape and color of the cat or panther, seemed to dart forth sparks of fire.

"Stop!" cried she.

Poor Orthon felt a cold shiver pervade his frame, while the damp, chill air of that unfrequented spot seemed to cling around him like an icy mantle. The ground he trod upon seemed to re-echo the dull moaning of a tomb. All this, combined with the fierce, penetrating look of Catherine, and his own uneasy fears, proved too much for the page, who sunk nearly paralyzed against the walls of this fearful spot.

"Where," said the queen-mother, fixing on him her sharp, intimidating glance, "is the billet you were desired to give to the king of Navarre?"

"The billet?" stammered Orthon.

"Ay, the billet—which, in the event of not finding the king, you were instructed to place behind the mirror."

"Indeed, madame," said Orthon, "I know not what your majesty alludes to."

"Nay, I but ask for the billet given you by M. de Mouy, about an hour since, behind the Archery Garden."

"Your majesty is wholly mistaken or misinformed," answered Orthon; "I have no billet of any kind."

"'Tis false!" said Catherine. "Give me that letter, and I will perform the promise I have made you."

"Indeed, indeed, madame, I have no billet to give up."

Catherine began to lose all patience. She ground her teeth with rage; then suddenly checking herself, and assuming a bland smile, she said:

"Come, come, foolish boy, surrender that useless paper, and a thousand golden crowns shall be your reward."

"But how can I give you what I do not possess? Please your majesty to credit me; I have no such billet in my keeping."

"You shall have two thousand crowns!"

"Nay, gracious madame, since I have nothing to give, I cannot give it."

"Say *ten* thousand crowns!"

Orthon, who, young as he was, could plainly perceive the rising anger of the queen, decided that the only chance remaining of preserving his master's secret was to swallow the disputed billet. With this design he attempted to take it from his pocket, but the quick eye of Catherine divined his intention and stayed his purpose.

"There, there, my child!" said she, laughing, "that will do. Your fidelity, it seems, is above all temptation. Well—when royalty would secure to itself a faithful follower, it is requisite to try the devotedness of the heart it would attach. I now know what opinion to form of your zeal and faithfulness. Take this purse, in earnest of my future bounty, and carry the billet to your master, with an intimation that, after to-day, I take you into my service. You may now depart: you can let yourself out by the door we entered at—it opens from within."

So saying, Catherine placed a heavily filled purse in the hands of the astonished youth, and then walked on a few steps, placing her hand against the wall.

"Thanks, gracious madame!" murmured Orthon. "Then you are good enough to pardon me all I have done to displease you?"

"Nay, more; I reward you as a faithful bearer of billets-doux—a pleasing messenger of love! One only fault I find with you; you forget that your master is waiting for you."——"True!" said the youth, springing toward the door.

But scarcely had he advanced two or three steps, than the ground gave way beneath his feet. He stumbled, extended his hands, with a fearful cry, and disappeared in one of those horrible oubliettes of the Louvre of which Catherine had just touched the spring.

"Now, then," said Catherine, "thanks to this fool's obstinacy, I shall have nearly two hundred stairs to descend!"

The Florentine then returned to her apartments, from whence she took a dark lantern; then returning to the gallery, closed the spring, and opened the door of a spiral staircase, which seemed as though contrived to penetrate into the very bowels of the earth. Proceeding along the windings of this descent, she reached a second door, which, revolving on its hinges, admitted to the depths of the oubliette, where—crushed, bleeding, and mutilated, by a fall of more than one hundred feet—lay the still palpitating form of poor Orthon; while, on the other side of the wall forming the barrier of this dreadful spot, the waters of the Seine were heard to ripple by, brought by a species of subterraneous filtration to the foot of the staircase.

Having reached the damp and unwholesome abyss, which during her reign had witnessed numerous similar scenes to that now enacted, Catherine proceeded to search the corpse, eagerly drew forth the desired billet, ascertained by the lantern that it was the one she sought, then pushing the mangled body from her, she pressed a spring, the bottom of the oubliette sank down, and the corpse, borne by its own weight, disappeared toward the river.

Closing the door after her, she reascended; and returning to her closet, read

the paper poor Orthon had so valiantly defended. It was conceived in these words:

"This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, Hotel de la belle Etoile. Should you come, no reply is requisite; if otherwise, send word back, *No*, by the bearer. DE MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE."

As Catherine read these words, a smile of triumph curled her lip. She thought only of the victory she had gained, without once considering the price she had purchased it at.

And after all, what was Orthon? Merely a faithful, devoted follower; a young, a handsome, and noble-minded youth. Nothing more!

The billet read, Catherine immediately returned to the apartments of Madame de Sauve, and placed it behind the mirror. As she returned, she found the captain of the guards in the corridor, awaiting her further commands.

"Madame," said M. de Nancey, "according to your majesty's orders, the horse has been duly prepared."

"Ah, indeed!" said Catherine. "But we shall not need the horse you have prepared. Upon questioning the youth, I find he is not sufficiently intelligent to be intrusted with the message I designed to send by him. I have therefore made him a little present, and dismissed him by the small side-wicket."

"But," persisted M. de Nancey, "your majesty's commission?"

"What commission?" asked Catherine.

"That which your majesty proposed accomplishing by means of this youth. Will it please you that I go myself, or send one of my men to do your royal command?"

"No," said Catherine; "both you and your men, M. de Nancey, will have other work this evening."

And Catherine returned to her apartments, in full hope and expectation of holding the detested king of Navarre in her power ere the morrow's sun had risen.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE HOSTELRY OF "LA BELLE ETOILE."

Two hours after the event we have described, Madame de Sauve, having completed her attendance on the queen, entered her apartments; Henry followed her; and Dariole having informed him that Orthon had been, he went to the glass, and took the billet.

It was, as we have seen, couched in these terms:

"This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, Hotel de la Belle Etoile. Should you come, no reply is requisite; if otherwise, send word back, *No*, by the bearer. DE MOUY DE SAINT PHALE."

There was no address upon it.

"Henry is certain to go," had thought Catherine; "for even did he not wish it, he cannot find the bearer to tell him so."

Catherine was right; Henry inquired after Orthon. Dariole told him he had gone out with the queen-mother; but Henry felt no uneasiness, as he knew Orthon was incapable of betraying him.

He dined, as he was accustomed, at the king's table, who rallied him upon the mistakes he had made that morning in hawking. Henry excused himself, alleging he dwelt on the mountains, and not in the plains; but he promised Charles to learn the noble art better.

Catherine was in an excellent humor; and when she rose from table, requested Marguerite to pass the evening with her.

At eight o'clock, Henry took two of his gentlemen, went out by the Porte St. Honore, entered again by the Tour de Bois, crossed the Seine at the ferry of the Nesle, mounted the Rue Saint Jacques, and there dismissed them, as if he were going to an amorous rendezvous. At the corner of the Rue des Mathurins he found a man on horseback, wrapped in a large cloak: he approached him.

"Mantes!" said the man.

"Pau!" replied the king.

The horseman instantly dismounted. Henry wrapped himself in his splashed mantle, sprang on his steed, rode down the Rue de la Harpe, crossed the Pont St. Michel, passed the Rue Barthelemy, crossed the river again on the Pont au Meunier, descended the quays, reached the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, and knocked at Maitre la Huriere's.

La Mole was in a little chamber, writing a long love-letter; to whom may be easily imagined.

Coconnas was in the kitchen, watching half a dozen partridges roasting, and disputing with La Huriere as to whether they were done or not.

At this moment Henry knocked, Gregoire went to take his horse, and the traveler entered, stamping on the floor as if to warm his feet.

"Eh!" said La Mole, continuing to write; "La Huriere, here is a gentleman wants you."

La Huriere advanced, and looked at Henry; and as his large cloak did not inspire him with very great veneration:

"What are you?" asked he.

"Eh, sang Dieu!" returned Henry, pointing to La Mole. "I am, as the gentleman told you, a Gascon gentleman come to court."

"What do you want?"

"A room and supper."

"I do not let a room to any one, unless he has a lackey."

"Oh, but I will pay you a rose noble for your room and supper."

"You are very generous, worthy sir," said La Huriere, with some distrust.

"No; but expecting to sup here, I invited a friend of mine to meet me. Have you any good wine of Artois?"

"I have as good as Henry of Navarre drinks."

"Ah, good! Here is my friend."

As he spoke, the door opened, and a gentleman somewhat older than the first, and having a long rapier at his side, entered.

"Ah, ah," said he, "you are exact, my young friend. It is something for a man who has traveled two hundred leagues to be so punctual."

"Is this your guest?" asked La Huriere.

"Yes," replied the first, shaking hands with the young man with the rapier.

"Maitre," said La Mole to La Huriere, "free us from these Huguenot fellows; Coconnas and I cannot converse together while they are there."

"Carry the supper into No. 2, on the third floor," said La Huriere. "Upstairs, gentlemen."

The two travelers followed Gregoire, who lighted them.

Coconnas watched them until they disappeared, and then came close to La Mole.

"Did you see them?"

"Ay, truly."

"And who are they?"

"How should I know?"

"I'd swear they are Henry of Navarre, and the man in the scarlet mantle."

"Ay, perhaps so."

"Well, you may rely on it, there is some plot going on."

"Oh, no; some love intrigue."

"Bah! no such thing, However, I do not belong to the Duke d'Alencon now—so I care not. Let's go to supper."

Meantime Henry and De Mouy were installed in their chamber.

"Well, sire," said De Mouy, "have you seen Orthon?"

"No; but I found his billet. I suppose he was frightened, for the queen saw him. I had some fear about him; for Dariole told me the queen had a long conversation with him."

"Oh, there is no danger; he is very quick-witted. I will venture to say the queen did not learn much from him."

"Have you seen him yourself?"

"No; but he will come this evening to fetch me, armed with a good petronel; and he can tell us what passed as we walk along."

"That is right; besides, La Mole is on the watch downstairs, and should anything occur, he will give us notice."

"Well! what says M. d'Alencon?"

"He will not go; he says so distinctly. The departure of D'Anjou, and the king's illness have made him alter his mind."

"It is he who has spoiled our plan?"

"Yes."

"It was he betrayed us?"

"No; but he is ready to do so on the first opportunity."

"Coward! traitor!—why did he not answer my letters?"

"In order to have proofs against you, and that you should have none against

him. Meantime, all is then lost; is it not so, De Mouy?"

"On the contrary, won: you know all the party, except De Condé's fraction, were for you, and only used D'Alencon as a safeguard. Since the day of the ceremony I have arranged everything. I shall have fifteen hundred horse ready in a week; they will be posted on the road to Pau; they will surely suffice?"

Henry smiled, and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"De Mouy," said he, "you, and you alone, know the king of Navarre is not such a coward as men think."

"I know it, sire; and I trust ere long all France will know it too. When do you hunt again?"

"In a week or ten days."

"Well, everything seems quiet now. No one thinks of the Duke d'Anjou; the king gets better every day; the persecution against us has ceased. Play the amiable with the queen-mother and M. d'Alencon; tell the duke you cannot go without him, and try and make him believe you."

"Oh, he shall believe me!"

"Has he such confidence in you?"

"Not in me, but in the queen."

"And is the queen true to us?"

"I have ample proofs of it; besides, she is ambitious."

"Well, three days before you hunt, tell me where it will be—at Bondy, at St. Germain's, or at Rambouillet. When you see La Mole, spur on—follow him; once out of the forest, they must have fleet steeds to overtake us."

"Agreed."

"Have you money, sire?"

Henry made the same grimace he made all his life at the same question.

"Not much," said he; "but I believe Margot has."

"Well, bring all you can with you. Orthon tells me he saw that scoundrel Maurevel, whom Rene has cured, walking about the Arsenal."

"Ah, I understand."

"You will be king some day, and will avenge yourself as a king; I am a soldier, and avenge myself as one. When all my affairs are arranged, which will be in five or six days, I will walk round the Arsenal myself, and after giving him two or three rapier thrusts, I shall quit Paris."

"Do as you will. Ah! what do you think of La Mole?"

"A charming fellow—brave and faithful."

"And discreet; he must follow us, and then I must think of his reward."

As Henry pronounced these words, the door flew open and La Mole rushed in.

"Quick! quick!" cried he, "the house is surrounded."

"Surrounded!" exclaimed Henry, "by whom?"

"By the king's guards."

"Oh," said De Mouy, drawing two pistols from his belt, "battle, then!"

"What can you do against fifty men?" said La Mole.

"He is right," said the king, "and if there were any means of retreat—"

"I know one," said La Mole, "if your majesty will follow me."

"And De Mouy—"

"Can follow us; but you must be quick."

Steps were heard on the stairs.

"It is too late," said Henry.

"If you could occupy them five minutes," said La Mole, "I could save the king."

"I will occupy them," said De Mouy.

"But what will you do?"

"Oh, do not fear for me!"

And De Mouy rapidly concealed the king's plate, goblet, and napkin, so that it might seem he had supped alone.

"Come, sire—come!" cried La Mole.

"My brave De Mouy," said Henry.

De Mouy seized his hand, kissed it, pushed the door to the instant they were outside, and bolted it.

"Quick—quick, sire!" said La Mole, "they are on the stairs!"

At this moment, the torches were visible on the stairs, and the rattling of arms was heard.

La Mole guided the king in the darkness, and conducting him two stories higher, opened a door, which he then secured, and opening the window:

"Does your majesty fear an excursion on the roofs?" said he.

"I, a chamois hunter!"

"Follow me, and I will guide you."

And, getting out of the window, La Mole clambered along the ridge, then passed along a gulley formed by two roofs, at the end of which was the open window of a garret.

"Here we are," said La Mole.

"So much the better," returned Henry, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Now, then," continued La Mole, "this garret communicates with a staircase, and the staircase with the street. I traveled the road on a more terrible night that this."——"Go on—go on!"

La Mole sprang into the open window, opened the door, and placing the cord that served as a baluster in Henry's hand: "Come, sire," said he.

Henry had stopped before a window opposite the Belle Etoile; the stairs were crowded with armed soldiers, bearing torches. Suddenly, the king saw a group descend the stairs, with De Mouy in the midst; he had surrendered his sword, and walked quietly on.

"Brave De Mouy!" said the king.

"Ma foi! sire, he seems very composed, and even laughs; he meditates some plan, for he seldom smiles."

"All is well, then," replied Henry. "Let us regain the Louvre."

"Nothing easier; wrap yourself in your mantle, for the street is full of people, and we shall pass for spectators."

They both gained the Rue d'Averon, but in passing by the Rue des Poulies, they saw De Mouy and his escort cross the place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

"Ah!" said Henry, "they are taking him to the Louvre. Diable! the wicket will be closed; they will take the name of every one who enters, and I shall be suspected of having been with him."

"Well, sire," replied La Mole, "there's the queen of Navarre's window."

"Mon Dieu! I did not think of that. But how shall I attract her attention?"

"Oh," said La Mole, bowing with an air of respectful gratitude, "your majesty throws stones so well."

CHAPTER XLVII.

DE MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE.

THIS time Catherine had taken her precautions so well that she believed herself sure of her object.

Consequently, about ten o'clock, she had sent away Marguerite, quite convinced that the queen of Navarre was ignorant of the plot against her husband, and went to the king.

Puzzled by the air of triumph which, in spite of her habitual dissimulation, appeared on his mother's countenance, Charles questioned Catherine, who only said:

"I can make but one reply to your majesty, and that is, you will this evening be delivered from two of your bitterest enemies."

Charles lowered his eyebrows, like a man who says to himself: "This is well—we shall see;" and whistled his tall boarhound, who came to him, dragging his belly along the ground like a serpent, and, placing his fine and intelligent head on his master's knee, crouched.

After a few minutes, which Catherine passed with her eyes fixed and ears attentive, there was suddenly heard the noise of a pistol-shot in the courtyard of the Louvre.

"What noise is that?" inquired Charles, with a frown, while the hound rose up and pricked his ears.

"Nothing," Catherine replied, "it was only a signal."

"And what is the meaning of that signal?"

"It means that, from this moment, sire, your only, your real enemy is unable any longer to injure you."

"Have they been killing a man?" inquired Charles, looking at his mother with that eye of command which signified that assassination and mercy are two inherent attributes of royal power.

"No, sire, they have only arrested two."

"Oh," murmured Charles, "always hidden plots, conspiracies against the king. Mort diable! mother, I am an oldish boy, big enough to take care of myself, and want neither leading-strings

"And you recognized this gentleman, no doubt."

"I did not, but the guards did."

"And who was he?" inquired Charles IX.

"M. the Count Annibal de Coconnas."

"Annibal de Coconnas!" repeated the king, gloomy and reflective. "He who made so terrible a slaughter of the Huguenots during the St. Bartholomew?"

"M. de Coconnas, gentleman of the Duke d'Alencon," replied De Nancey.

"Good! good!" said Charles. "You may withdraw, M. de Nancey; and another time, remember one thing."

"What is that, sire?"

"That you are in my service, and will take your orders from no one but myself."

M. de Nancey retired backward, bowing most respectfully. De Mouy smiled ironically at Catherine.

There was a brief silence. The queen pulled the tassels of her cordeliere; Charles caressed his dog.

"But what was your intention, sir?" continued Charles. "Were you acting violently?"

"Against whom, sire?"

"Why, against Henry, or Francois, or myself?"

"Sire, we had the renunciation of your brother-in-law, the consent of your brother, and, as I had the honor to tell you, we were on the point of soliciting your majesty's authority, when there happened this unfortunate affair of M. de Maurevel's."

"Well, mother, I see no objection to all this. You were perfectly right, M. de Mouy, in requiring a king. Yes, Navarre may be, and ought to be, a separate kingdom. Moreover, this kingdom seems made expressly to endow my brother D'Alencon, who has always had so great a desire for a crown, that when we wear our own, he cannot withdraw his gaze therefrom. The only thing which opposed this coronation was Harry's rights; but, since Harry voluntarily abdicates—"

"Voluntarily, sire?"

"It appears to be the will of God! M. de Mouy, you are free to return to your brethren, whom I have chastised—somewhat rudely, perchance; but that is between God and myself; and tell them, that since they desire to have my brother, the Duke d'Alencon, for king of Navarre, the king of France accedes to their desires. From this moment, Navarre is a kingdom, and its sovereign's name is Francois. I ask but eight days for my brother to be ready to leave Paris with the *éclat* and pomp which appertain to a king. Go, M. de Mouy—go. M. de Nancey, allow M. de Mouy to retire. He is free."

"Sire," said De Mouy, advancing a step, "will your majesty allow me—"

"Yes," replied Charles.

And he extended his hand to the young Huguenot.

De Mouy went on one knee, and respectfully kissed the king's hand.

"Apropos," said Charles, as De Mouy was about to rise, "have you not demanded from me justice on that ruffian, De Maurevel?"

"I have, sire."

"I know not where he is, that I might render it to you, for he is in hiding; but if you meet him, take justice into your own hands. I authorize you to do so, and with all my heart."

"Oh, sire!" exclaimed De Mouy, "this is all I could desire. I know not where he is; but your majesty may rest assured I will find him."

De Mouy respectfully saluted the king and Catherine, and then retired uninterrupted. He made all haste to the hostelry of the Belle Etoile, where he found his horse, by whose aid, three hours after he had quitted Paris, the young man breathed in safety behind the walls of Mantes.

Catherine, bursting with rage, regained her apartment, whence she passed into that of Marguerite, where she found Henry in his dressing gown, as if just going to bed.

"Satan!" she muttered, "aid a poor queen, for whom God will do nothing more!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TWO HEADS FOR ONE CROWN.

"REQUEST M. d'Alencon to come to me," said Charles, as his mother left him.

M. de Nancey hastened to M. d'Alencon's apartments and delivered the king's message. The duke started when he heard it. He always trembled in Charles's presence, and the more so when he had reason to be afraid. Still, he went to his brother with all speed. Charles was standing up, and whistling a hunting air.

As he entered, the Duke d'Alencon caught from the glassy eye of Charles one of those looks full of hatred, which he so well understood.

"Your majesty has asked for me," he said. "I am here, sire. What is your majesty's desire?"

"I desire to tell you, brother, that, in order to recompense you for the great friendship you bear me, I have resolved to do for you to-day the thing you most desire in all the world."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. Ask yourself what that thing is of which you most frequently dream, without daring to ask for, and that thing I will give you."

"Sire," said Francois, "I swear to you, that there is nothing I more desire than the continuance of the king's good health."

"Then you will be deeply gratified to know, D'Alencon, that the indisposition I experienced at the time when the Poles arrived has quite passed by. I have escaped, thanks to Harry, a furious wild boar, who would have ripped me up, and I am so well as not to envy the healthiest man in my dominions: so that, without being an unkind brother, you may wish for something else besides the continuation of my health, which is perfectly restored."

"I desire nothing else, sire."

"Yes, Francois," continued Charles, impatiently, "you desire the crown of Navarre, and have had an understanding to that effect with Harry and De Mouy: the first, that he would abdicate, and the second, that he might offer it to you. Well, Harry has renounced, De Mouy has mentioned your wishes to me, and the crown you are ambitious to—"

"Stop!" said D'Alencon in a trembling voice.

"Well, mort diable! it is yours."

D'Alencon turned ghastly pale, and then his face was suffused. The favor which the king granted him at this moment threw him into utter despair.

"But, sire," he replied, palpitating with emotion, and in vain trying to recover his self-possession, "I have never desired, and certainly never sought for such a thing."

"That is possible," said the king, "for you are very discreet, brother; but it has been desired—sought for you."

"Sire, I swear to you that I never—"

"Do not swear."

"But, sire, do you, then, exile me?"

"Do you call this exile, Francois? Peste! you are hard to please. What better thing could you hope for?"

D'Alencon bit his lips in despair.

"Ma foi!" continued Charles, affecting a kind demeanor, "I did not think you were so popular, Francois, and particularly with the Huguenots. Why, they really petition for you; and what better could I desire them to have than a person devoted to me; a brother whom I love, and who is incapable of betraying me, at the head of a party who for thirty years has been in arms against us. This must calm everything, as if by enchantment, to say nothing of the fact that we shall be all kings in the family. There will only be poor Harry, who will remain my friend, and nothing more. But he is not ambitious, and this title, which no one else covets, he claims."

"Oh, sire, you mistake; I covet that title—a title to which no one has such right as I have. Henry is only your brother by marriage; I am your brother by blood and in heart, and I entreat you, sire, keep me near you."

"No, no, Francois," replied Charles, "it would be wrong."

"How, sire?"

"For a thousand reasons."

"But, sire, have you a more faithful companion than I am? From my childhood I have never quitted your majesty."

"I know it well—I know it well; and

sometimes I have wished you further off."

"What means your majesty?"

"Oh, nothing — nothing; I know—I know. Ah! what glorious hunting you will have there, Francois; I shall envy you! Do you know they chase the bear in the mountains there, as we do the boar here. You'll send us such splendid skins; you know they hunt there with the poniard—wait for the animal, excite and irritate him: he goes toward the hunter, and four paces off he rises on his hind legs; then they plunge the steel into his heart, as Henry did the wild boar at our last hunt. You know it is dangerous work; but you are brave, Francois; and the danger would be real pleasure to you."

"Ah! your majesty increases my trouble, for I shall no more hunt with you."

"Corbœuf! so much the better," said the king, "it does not suit either of us to hunt together—"

"What means your majesty?"

"To hunt with me causes you such pleasure, and creates in you so much emotion, that you, who are skill personified—you, who with any arquebuse can bring down a magpie at a hundred paces—with a weapon of which you are such a perfect master, failed at twenty paces to hit a wild boar, and broke the leg of my best horse! Mort diable! Francois, that makes one reflect, you must know!"

"Oh, sire, think of my emotion," said D'Alencon, livid with agitation.

"Yes," replied Charles; "I guess what the emotion might be, and so I say, Francois, it is best for us to hunt at a distance from each other, for fear of such emotions. You might, you know, in another emotion, kill the horseman instead of the horse—the king instead of the animal! When Montgomery killed our father Henry II., by accident—emotion, perhaps—the blow placed our brother Francois II. on the throne, and sent our father Henry to Saint Denys; a little in this way can do so much."

The duke felt the perspiration pour down his brow at this unexpected attack. The king had surmised all, and veiling his anger under a jesting tone, was perhaps more terrible than if he had outpoured his lava of hate in its fullest wrath; his revenge was proportioned to his rancor. In proportion as the one was sharpened, the other increased; and, for the first time, D'Alencon felt remorse, or rather regret, for having meditated a crime that had not succeeded. He had sustained the struggle as long as he could, but at this last blow he bowed his head.

Charles fixed on him his vulture gaze, and watched closely every feeling that displayed itself in the young duke's countenance, as if he perused an open book. "Brother," said the king, "we have declared our resolution; that resolution is immutable. You will go."

D'Alencon started; but Charles did not appear to observe it, and continued: "I wish that Navarre should be proud of having at its head a brother of the king of France. Gold, power, honor—you will have all that belongs to your birth, as your brother Henry had; and, like him," he added, with a smile, "you will bless me when afar off—thank Heaven, blessings know no distance!"

"Sire—"

"Accept, or rather resign yourself. Once a king, we shall find for you a wife worthy of a son of France, who may—who knows?—bring you another throne."

"But," observed the Duke d'Alencon, "your majesty forgets your good friend Henry."

"Henry!—why, I told you he does not desire the throne of Navarre; he has abandoned it. Henry is a jovial fellow, and not a pale-face, like you; he likes to amuse himself, and laugh at his ease, and not weary himself, as we are compelled to do, who wear crowns upon our heads."

"Your majesty then desires me to occupy myself—"

"By no means. Do not in any way disturb yourself, I will arrange everything myself. Say not a word to any one, and I will take upon myself to give publicity to everything. Francois, good day."

There was no reply. The duke bowed and left the apartment, with rage devouring his heart.

He was most desirous to find Henry,

and talk with him of all that had passed; but he could only find Catherine, for Henry avoided, while his brother sought him.

The duke, seeing Catherine, endeavored to swallow his griefs and tried to smile.

"Well, madame," he said, "do you know the great news?"

"I know that there is an idea of making a king of you, sir."

"It is a great kindness on the part of my brother, madame; and I am inclined to think that a portion of my gratitude is due to you; although, I confess, that at bottom it gives me pain thus to despoil the king of Navarre."

"You are very fond of Harry, then, my son, it appears."

"Why, yes, for some time we have been closely allied."

"Do you suppose that he loves you as much as you love him?"

"I hope so, madame."

"Are there brothers, then, among kings?" she asked, with a singular smile.

"Oh, we were neither of us kings when our alliance began."

"Yes; but things are changed now: who can say that you will not both be kings?" Catherine saw, by the start and sudden color of the duke, that the shaft had hit the mark.

"He? Harry, king? and of what kingdom?"

"The most glorious in Christendom, my son."

"Ah!" said D'Alencon, growing very pale, "what mean you?"

"What a good mother should say to a son—what you have thought of more than once, Francois."

"I?" said the duke, "I have thought of nothing, madame, I swear to you!"

"I believe you; for your friend, your brother Henry, as you call him, is, under his apparent frankness, a very clever and wily person, who keeps his secrets better than you do yours, Francois. For instance, did he ever tell you that De Mouy was his man of business?"

And Catherine looked at Francois as though she would read his very heart; but dissimulation was Francois' forte, and he bore her gaze unshrinkingly.

"De Mouy!" said he, with surprise, and as if he uttered the name for the first time.

"Yes, the Huguenot De Mouy de Saint-Phale; he who nearly killed De Maurevel, and who is intriguing and raising an army to support your brother Henry against your family."

Catherine, unaware that Francois knew as much on this matter as herself, rose at these words, and would have gone out majestically, but Francois detained her.

"Mother," he said, "another word, if you please. How can Henry, with his feeble resources, carry on any war to disquiet my family?"

"Child," said the queen, smiling, "know he is supported by more than thirty thousand men, who, the day he says the word, will appear as suddenly as if they sprang forth from the ground; and these thirty thousand men are Huguenots, remember; in other words, the bravest soldiers in the world; and then, he has a protector you have not been able, or have not chosen to conciliate."

"Who is that?"

"He has the king—the king, who loves him, pushes him on; the king, who, from jealousy against your brother of Poland, and from spite against you, seeks a successor out of his family."

"The king! Do you think so, mother?"

"Do you not see how he takes to Harry, his dear Harry?"

"Yes, madame; yes."

"And how he is repaid in return! for this very Harry, forgetting how his brother-in-law would have shot him on Saint-Bartholomew's day, grovels to the very earth like a dog, and licks the hand which has beaten him."

"Yes," said Francois, "Henry is very humble with my brother Charles; and, the king always rallying him as to his ignorance, he has begun to study hawking. It was only yesterday he asked me if I had not some books on that sport."

"Well," said Catherine, "well, and what reply did you make him?"

"That I would look in my library."

"Good, good!" answered Catherine: "he must have that book. I will give

him one in your name. Will you, D'Alencon, obey me blindly in all I desire you to do with regard to Henry, who loves you not, whatever you may think."

D'Alencon smiled, and replied, "I will, mother."

"Well, then, on the morning of the next hunt come here and seek for the book; I will give it you, and you shall carry it to the detested Henry."

"And—?"

"Leave the rest to Providence or chance." Francois bowed in acquiescence, and left his mother's chamber.

Meantime, Marguerite received through La Mole a letter from De Mouy addressed to the king of Navarre. As in politics the two illustrious allies had no secrets, she opened the missive and read it; and then, going quickly and silently along the secret passage, went into the king of Navarre's antechamber, no longer guarded, since Orthon's disappearance. This circumstance had greatly disquieted Henry, who felt assured the poor boy had fallen a victim to some machination of the queen-mother.

Any other than Henry would have kept silence; but Henry calculated cleverly, and saw his silence would betray him; and thus he sought and inquired for Orthon everywhere, even in the presence of the king and the queen-mother, and of every one, down to the sentinel at the wicket of the Louvre; but every inquiry was in vain.

The antechamber was thus empty; Henry declaring he would not replace him until he knew for certain that he had disappeared forever. Henry turned round as the queen entered.

"You, madame!" he cried.

"Yes," replied Marguerite; "read quickly!" and she handed the open letter to him. It contained these lines:

"SIRE—The moment has arrived for putting our plan of flight into execution.

"In five or six days there will be hawking on the banks of the Seine, from Saint-Germains to Maisons, all along the forest.

"Go to this meeting, although it is only a hawking party: put a good coat of mail under your doublet, your best sword by your side, and ride the fleetest horse in your stable.

"About noon, when the sport is at its height, and the king is galloping after his falcon, get away alone, if you come alone; with the queen, if her majesty will follow you.

"Fifty of our party will be concealed in the pavilion of Francois the First, of which we have the key; no one will know that they are there, for they will come at night, and the shutters will be closed.

"You will pass by the Allée des Violettes, at the end of which I shall be on the watch; at the right of this allée will be Messieurs de la Mole and Coconnas, with two horses, intended to replace yours if they should be fatigued.

"Adieu, sire! be ready, as we shall be."

"Now then, sire," said Marguerite, "be a hero; it is not difficult. You have but to follow the route indicated, and create for me a glorious throne," said the daughter of Henry II.

An imperceptible smile rose to the thin lips of the Béarnais, as he kissed Marguerite's lips, and went out to explore the passage, whistling the burden of an old song:

"Cil qui mieux battit la muraille
N'entra point dedans le chasteau."

The precaution was good, for as he opened his bedchamber door the Duke d'Alencon opened that of his antechamber. Henry motioned to Marguerite with his hand, and then said aloud, "Ah, is it you, brother? Welcome!"

The queen understood her husband's meaning, and went quickly into a dressing-closet, in front of the door of which was a thick tapestry.

D'Alencon entered with a timorous step, and looking around him, "Are we alone, brother?" he asked, in an undertone.

"Quite. But what ails you?—you seem greatly disturbed."

"We are discovered, Henry!"

"How discovered?"

"De Mouy has been arrested!"

"I know it."

"Well, De Mouy has told the king all!"

"All what?"

"He said I was ambitious of the throne of Navarre, and had conspired to obtain it."

"The dunderhead!" said Henry. "So that you are compromised, my dear brother! How is it, then, that you are not under arrest?"

"I cannot tell; the king jested with me, and offered me the throne of Navarre, but I said nothing."

"And you did well, ventre-saint-gris!" said the Béarnais. "Stand firm, for our lives depend on that."

"Yes," said Francois, "our position is difficult, and that is why I came to ask your advice, my brother. Ought I to flee or remain?"

"You have seen the king, and he has spoken to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must have ascertained his thoughts; act from your own inspiration."

"I would rather remain," said Francois.

Master of himself as he was, yet Henry allowed a movement of joy to escape him, and Francois observed it.

"Remain, then," said Henry.

"And you?"

"Why, if you remain, I have no motive for going; I should go if you went, but stay if you stay."

"So, then," said D'Alencon, "there is an end of all our plans, and you give way at the first repulse."

"Thanks to my contented disposition," replied Henry, "I am happy anywhere and everywhere."

"Well, then," observed D'Alencon, "there's no more to be said; only, if you change your mind, let me know."

"Corbleu! I shall be sure to do that," replied Henry. "Have we not agreed to have no secrets for one another?"

D'Alencon said no more, and withdrew full of thought, for he believed he had seen the tapestry move at a certain moment; and, indeed, scarcely was D'Alencon gone than Marguerite reappeared.

"What do you think of this visit?" inquired Henry.

"That there is something new and important; what it is, I will learn."

"In the meanwhile—?"

"In the meanwhile, fail not to come to my apartments to-morrow evening."

"I will not fail, be assured, madame," was the reply of Henry, kissing his wife's hand very gallantly.

With the same precaution she had used in coming, Marguerite returned to her own apartments.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE BOOK OF VENERIE.

FIVE days had elapsed since the events we have related. The Louvre clock had just struck four, when D'Alencon, who, with all the rest of the court, had risen early to prepare for the hunt, entered his mother's apartment.

The queen was not in her chamber, but she had left orders that if her son came he was to wait. At the end of a few minutes she came out of a cabinet where she carried on her chemical studies, and into which no one ever entered. As she opened the door, a strong odor of some acrid perfume pervaded the room, and looking through the door of the cabinet, he perceived a thick white vapor, like that of some aromatic substance, floating in the air.

"Yes," said Catherine, "I burned some old parchments, and their smell was so offensive that I cast some juniper into the brazier." D'Alencon bowed.

"Well," continued the queen, concealing beneath the sleeves of her robe-de-chambre her hand stained with large reddish spots, "anything new?"

"Nothing."

"Have you seen Henry?"

"Yes."

"Will he go?"

"He refuses positively."

"The knave!"

"What say you, madame?"

"That he will go."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then he escapes us?"

"Yes," said Catherine.

"And you let him depart?"

"I not only suffer him, but, I tell you, it is necessary he should leave the court."

"I do not understand you."

"Listen: a skillful physician, the same who gave me the book of venerie you are about to present to the king of Navarre, has told me that he is on the point of being attacked with consumption—an incurable disease; so that if he be doomed to die, it were better that he should die away from us than at the court."

"That would be too painful for us."

"Especially for Charles; whereas, if he die, after having betrayed him, he will look upon his death as a punishment from Heaven."

"You are right: it were better he should depart. But are you sure he will go?"

"All my measures are taken. The place of rendezvous is in the forest of St. Germain's; fifty Huguenots are to escort him to Fontainebleau, where five hundred others await him."

"And does Margot accompany him?" asked D'Alencon.

"Yes, but upon Henry's death she returns to court."

"Are you sure that Henry will die?"

"The physician who gave me this book assured me of it."

"And where is this book?"

Catherine entered her cabinet, and returned instantly with the book in her hand.

"Here it is," said she.

D'Alencon looked at it, not without a certain feeling of terror.

"What is this book?" asked he, shuddering.

"I have already told you. It is a treatise on the art of rearing and training falcons, goshawks, and ger-falcons, written for the Italian prince, Castruccio Castracani, of Lucca."

"What am I to do with it?"

"Give it to Henry, who has asked you for a book of the kind. As he is going to hawk this morning with the king, he will not fail to read it; but be sure to give it to him."

"Oh, I dare not!" said D'Alencon, shuddering.

"Why not?" replied the queen; "it is a book like any other, except it has lain by so long that the leaves stick together. Do not attempt to read it, for it can only be read by wetting the finger, and turning over each leaf, which occasions a great loss of time."

"So that it will only be read by a man who is anxious to learn the art of hawking?"

"Exactly so, my son—you understand?"

"Oh," said D'Alencon, "I hear Henry in the court; give it to me, and I will avail myself of his absence to place it in his room."

"I had rather you gave it to *him;* it is more certain."

"I have already told you I dare not."

"At least place it where it can be easily seen."

"I will place it where he must see it. Will it be better to open it?"

"Yes, open it."

"Give it me, then."

D'Alencon took with a trembling hand the book Catherine held out to him.

"Take it," said she. "There is no danger; besides, you have your gloves on."

D'Alencon wrapped the book in his mantle, as if still fearful.

"Make haste," continued the queen; "I expect Henry will enter every moment."

"Madame, I go."

And the duke left the apartment, trembling with emotion.

We have often introduced our readers into the apartments of the king of Navarre, and have made them witnesses of the events that have passed there, but never did the walls of the room see a face so pale as the Duke d'Alencon's, when he entered the apartment, the book in his hand.

On the wall hung Henry's sword. Some links of mail were scattered on the floor, a well-filled purse and a poniard lay on the table, and the light ashes in the grate showed D'Alencon that Henry had put on a shirt of mail, collected what money he could, and burned all papers that might compromise him.

"My mother was right," thought D'Alencon. "He would betray me."

Doubtless, this conviction gave him strength; for after having sounded the walls and lifted the tapestry, he took the book from under his cloak, placed it on the table, then, with a hesitation that betrayed his fears, opened the book at an engraving. The instant he had done so, he drew off his glove and cast it into the fire: the leather crackled, burned, and was soon reduced to ashes.

D'Alencon waited until he had seen it consumed, and then hastily returned to his own apartment.

As he entered, he heard steps on the winding-stair, and not doubting but that it was Henry, he closed his door.

Then he looked out of his window into the court below. Henry was not there, and this strengthened Francois' belief that it was he whom he had just heard.

The duke sat down, and took up a book: it was the History of France, a work dedicated to Charles IX.

But the duke could not fix his attention on it; it seemed to him he could see through the walls. His eyes appeared to plunge into the chamber of Henry, spite of the obstacles that separated them. In order to drive away the terrible object before his mind's eye, the duke vainly looked at his arms, his ornaments, his books; every detail of the engraving that he had seen but for a moment was before him still; it was a gentleman on horseback recalling his falcon, in a flat landscape.

Then it was not the book he saw, but the king of Navarre reading it, and wetting his thumb in order to turn over the pages. At this sight, fictitious and imaginary as it was, D'Alencon staggered against a table, and covered his eyes with his hands, as if to hide the horrible vision.

Suddenly D'Alencon saw Henry in the court; he stopped a few moments to speak to the men who were loading two mules, ostensibly with his provisions for the chase, but really with the money and other things he wished to take with him; then, having given his orders, he advanced toward the door.

D'Alencon stood motionless; it was not Henry, then, he had heard mount the stairs. He opened his door and listened; this time there was no mistake—it was Henry; D'Alencon recognized his step, even to the peculiar jingle of his spurs.

Henry's door opened, and then closed.

"Bon!" said D'Alencon; "he has passed through the first apartment, he has entered his bedchamber, he has looked if his sword, his purse, and his poniard are there; then he has seen the book open on the table. 'What is this book?' he asks himself; 'where has it come from?—who has brought it?' Then, seeing the engraving, he tries to read it, and turns over the leaves."

A cold damp passed over Francois.

"Will he call for help?" said he. "Is the poison sudden? No! for my mother said he would die of consumption."

Ten minutes passed in these horrible reflections. D'Alencon could support it no longer; he rose, and passed through his chamber, which was already filled with gentlemen.

"Good-day, gentlemen," said he, "I am going to the king."

And to distract his attention, to prepare an *alibi*, perhaps, D'Alencon descended to his brother's apartments. Why, he knew not—what had he to say? Nothing! it was not Charles he sought—it was Henry he fled from.

Francois traversed successively the salon and the sleeping-room, without meeting any one; he then thought Charles was in his armory, and he opened the door.

Charles was seated at a table in an armchair of carved oak; his back was turned to the door by which Francois had entered. The duke approached silently.

Charles was reading.

"Pardieu!" cried the king, "what an admirable book!—I did not think there was such a work in France."

D'Alencon listened.

"Devil take the leaves!" said Charles, as, wetting his thumb, he turned them. "It seems as if they had purposely stuck the leaves together, to conceal the marvels they contain."

D'Alencon bounded forward. The book Charles was reading was the same that

D'Alencon had taken into Henry's room. A cry burst from his lips.

"Ah, it is you, D'Alencon!" said the king; "you are just in time to see the most admirable work on venerie in the world."

D'Alencon's first idea was to snatch the book from his brother, but an infernal thought restrained him.

"Sire," asked he, "how did this book come into your possession?"

"Oh, I went into Harry's room to see if he was ready, and found this treasure, which I brought down with me to read."

And the king again moistened his finger, and again turned over the page.

"Sire," faltered D'Alencon, whose hair stood on end, "sire, I come to tell you—"

"Let me finish this chapter, Francois, and then tell me what you please. I have read, or rather devoured, fifty pages."

"My brother has tasted the poison five-and-twenty times," thought D'Alencon; "he is a dead man!"

Francois wiped the cold dew from his brow, and waited in silence, as the king bade him, until he had finished the chapter.

CHAPTER L.

THE HAWKING PARTY.

CHARLES read on: he seemed, indeed, to devour the pages; and each page, as we have said, was gummed to the other.

D'Alencon gazed wildly on this terrible spectacle.

"Oh," murmured he, "what will happen now? Shall I go into exile and seek a visionary throne, while Henry, on the first intelligence of Charles's illness, will return to some fortress near Paris, whence he may come hither in an hour or two; so that before D'Anjou even hears of Charles's death the whole dynasty will be changed."

Instantly his plan with regard to Henry altered. It was Charles who had read the poisoned book: Henry must stay. He was less to be dreaded in the Bastille, or a prisoner at Vincennes, than free, and at the head of thirty thousand men.

The duke waited until Charles finished his chapter, and then, "Brother," said he, "I waited because you ordered me; but I have something of the greatest importance to say to you."

"Ah, the devil take you!" returned Charles, whose pale cheeks glowed with unusual fire. "If you come and worry me, I'll get rid of you, as I have of the king of Poland."

"It is not on that subject I would speak to you. Your majesty has touched me in my most sensitive point, that of my love for you as a brother, and my devotion as your subject; and I come to prove to you I am no traitor."

"Well, well," said Charles, crossing his legs, and throwing himself back on his chair; "some fresh report—some new nightmare."

"No, sire; a certainty—a plot, of which I know all the details."

"A plot! let us hear this wonderful plot."

"Sire," said Francois, "while your majesty hawks in the plain of Vesinet, the king of Navarre will fly into the forest of St. Germains, where a troop of his friends await him, and will escape with him."

"I expected this!" cried Charles; "a fresh calumny against my poor Harry! When will you leave him alone?"

"Your majesty need not wait long to know whether what I say be true or false."

"Why not?"

"Because this evening he will be gone."

Charles rose. "Listen," said he: "I will once more seem to believe you; but mind, it is for the last time. Without there! summon the king of Navarre."

A soldier was about to obey, when Francois stopped him.

"That is a bad way to learn the truth," said he. "Henry will deny it, give a signal, all his accomplices will conceal themselves, and my mother and myself will be accused of calumny."

Charles opened the window, for the blood was rushing into his head. Then, turning to D'Alencon, "What would you do, then?" asked he.

"Sire," said D'Alencon, "I would surround the wood with three detachments

of light horse, who, at a certain hour, should beat the forest, and drive every one in it to the Pavilion of Francois the First, which I would, as if casually, have appointed as the place for dining at. Then, when Henry left you, I would follow him to the rendezvous, and capture him and his accomplices."

"A good idea enough!" said Charles. "Call the captain of my guards."

D'Alencon drew from his doublet a silver whistle, fastened to a chain of gold, and whistled. De Nancey appeared. Charles gave him some orders, in an undertone. Meanwhile Actæon, the boarhound, had dragged a book off the table and begun to tear it. Charles turned round and swore a terrible oath. The book was the precious Treatise on Venerie, of which there existed but three copies in the world.

The chastisement was proportionate to the offense. Charles seized a whip and lashed the dog soundly: Actæon yelled, and disappeared under a table covered with a large green cloth. The king picked up the book, and saw with joy that but one leaf was wanting, and that leaf, not a page of text, but an engraving. He locked it up carefully in a cupboard, to D'Alencon's great regret; who, now that it had fulfilled its fearful task, would fain have seen it out of Charles's hands.

Six o'clock struck, and the king descended. He first closed the door of the armory, locked it, and put his key in his pocket, D'Alencon earnestly watching each movement; on his way downstairs he stopped, and passed his hand over his eye.

"I do not know what is the matter with me," observed he; "but I feel very weak."

"Perhaps," faltered D'Alencon, "there is a storm in the air."

"A storm in March! you are mad," said Charles. "No no; I feel a dizziness, my skin is dry, I am overfatigued; that's all."

The fresh air, the cries of the huntsmen, and the noise of the horses and hounds, produced their ordinary effect upon him; he breathed freely, and felt exhilarant.

His first care was to look for Henry and Marguerite, who seemed, excellent spouses, as if they could not quit one another.

On perceiving Charles, Henry spurred his horse, and in three bounds was beside him.

"Ah, ah, Harry!" said Charles, "you are mounted as if you were going to hunt the stag, and yet you know we are only going to hawk."

Then without awaiting a reply, "Forward, gentlemen!" cried he, frowning; "we must be at the meet by nine."

Catherine was watching at a window, and her pale face only appeared: her figure was concealed by the curtain.

At Charles's order, the whole cortége passed through the gate of the Louvre, and along the road to St. Germains, amid the acclamations of the people, who saluted their young king as he rode by on his white steed.

"What did he say to you?" asked Marguerite of Henry.

"He felicitated me on the stoutness of my horse."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"I fear he knows something."

"I fear so."

"Let us be cautious."

Henry's face was lighted up, in reply, with one of his cordial smiles, as if to say, "Be easy, ma mie."

As for Catherine, when she had seen them all depart, she let fall the curtain: "This time," murmured she, "I think I have him."

Then, to satisfy herself, after having waited for a few minutes, she entered the king of Navarre's apartments, by aid of her pass-key. But she searched in vain for the book.

"He has locked it up," thought she; "and if he has not read it already, he will."

And she descended, convinced her project had succeeded.

The king arrived at St. Germains. The sun, hitherto hidden by a cloud, lighted up the splendid cortege. Then, as if it had awaited this moment, a heron rose from the reeds with a mournful cry.

"Haw! haw!" cried Charles, unhooding his falcon.

The falcon, dazzled for a moment by the light, described a circle; then suddenly perceiving the heron, dashed after it.

However, the heron, which had risen a hundred yards before the beaters, had profited by the time occupied in unhooding the falcon to gain a considerable distance; he was therefore at least at a height of five hundred feet, and was still mounting rapidly.

"Haw! haw! Bec-de-Fer!" cried Charles; "haw! haw!"

The noble bird, like an arrow, mounted after the heron, which had now wellnigh disappeared.

"Ah, coward!" said Charles, putting his horse to its speed, and throwing back his head, so as not to lose sight of the chase; "courage, Bec-de-Fer!"

The contest was most curious; the falcon was rapidly nearing the heron; the only question was, which could rise the highest. Fear had better wings than courage. The falcon passed underneath, and the heron, profiting by his advantage, dealt him a blow with his long beak. The falcon staggered, and seemed as if about to fly, but soon recovering himself, went after the heron. The latter, pursuing his advantage, had changed the direction of his flight, and sought the forest; but the falcon followed him so closely, that the heron was fain again to mount, and in a few seconds the two birds were scarcely distinguishable.

"Bravo, Bec-de-Fer!" cried Charles, "see, he is uppermost!"

"Faith!" said Henry, "I confess I do not see the one or the other."

"Nor I," said Marguerite.

"If you can't see them, you may hear them. At least the heron," replied Charles. "Hark! he asks quarter."

As he spoke, two or three plaintive cries were heard.

"Look, look!" cried Charles, "and you will see them descend quicker than they went up."

As the king spoke, the two birds reappeared: the falcon was uppermost.

"Bec-de-Fer has him!" shouted Charles.

The heron, outflown by the falcon, no longer sought to defend himself; he folded his wings, and dropped like a stone; but his adversary did the same; and when the fugitive again resumed his flight, he received a stroke that stunned him; he fell to the earth, and the falcon, uttering a note of victory, alighted by him.

"Brave falcon!" cried Charles, galloping toward the spot where the heron lay. But suddenly he stopped, and, uttering a piercing cry, let fall his bridle and pressed his hand to his stomach. All the courtiers hastened up.

"It is nothing," said he, with inflamed features and haggard eyes. "But I felt as if a hot iron was passing through me just now; but it is nothing." And he galloped on.

D'Alencon turned pale.

"What is the matter now?" asked Henry of Marguerite.

"I know not," replied she; "but did you see Charles?—he was purple!"

"He is not so generally," said Henry.

Arrived at the scene of combat, Charles sprang off his horse; but on alighting, he was forced to seize the saddle to prevent himself from falling.

"My brother!" cried Marguerite, "what is the matter?"

"I feel," said Charles, "what Portia must have felt when she swallowed her burning coals. It seems as if my breath was flame."

Meantime, the falcon was reclaimed, and all the suite gathered round Charles.

"What is all this?" cried he. "*Corps de Christ!* it is nothing, or at most only the sun that affects me. Unhood all the falcons!—there go a whole flight of herons!"

Five or six falcons were instantly unhooded, while all the chase galloped along the bank of the river.

"Well, madame, what say you?" asked Henry.

"That the moment is favorable, and that if the king does not look back, we may easily gain the forest."

Henry called the attendant who had the fallen heron in charge, and while the court swept on, remained behind, as if to exam-

ine the bird. At this moment, and as if to aid his plans, a pheasant rose. Henry slipped the jesses of his falcon: he had now the pretext of a chase on his own account to assist him.

CHAPTER LI.

THE PAVILION OF FRANCOIS THE FIRST.

AT the right of the Allée des Violettes is a long clearing, so far that it cannot be discovered from the high road, but yet the high road can be seen from the clearing.

In the middle of this clearing two men were lying on the grass, having a traveling cloak spread beneath them, at their side a long sword, and a musketoon (then called a petronel) with the muzzle turned from them. One of them was leaning on his knee and one hand, listening like a hare or deer.

"It appears to me," said this individual, "that the hunt drew very close upon us just now. I heard the cries of the hunters as they cheered on the falcon."

"And now," said the other, who appeared to await events with much more philosophy than his comrade, "now I hear them no longer; they must be a long way off."

"What the devil! my dear Annibal," said the other, "would you have? We must wait quietly; the place hides us and our mules and horses very well; De Mouy has selected a good spot, one which has all the concealments and privacy indispensable to a conspirator."

"Ah, good!" said the other gentleman; "that's the word, is it? Well, I expected it. So, then, we are conspiring, are we?"

"We are not conspiring; we are serving the king and queen."

"Well, it's all very odd!" said Coconnas, yawning. "It is not yet twelve o'clock, and therefore we have time for a nap;" and so saying, Coconnas stretched himself on his mantle like a man who is about to add practice to precept, but as his ear touched the ground, he raised his finger and motioned La Mole to be silent.

Then a distant sound was heard, at first scarcely perceptible, and to unpracticed ears would only have been the wind, but to the cavaliers it was the distant galloping of horses.

La Mole sprang to his feet in a moment.

"Here they are!" said he. "Now then for a start!"

Coconnas rose more quietly, and then a regular and measured noise struck the ear of the two friends; the neighing of a horse made the horses they had at ten paces off prick up their ears, and in an alley there passed, like a white shadow, a female, who, turning toward them, made a particular signal and disappeared.

"The queen!" they exclaimed, both at once.

"What can this mean?" said Coconnas.

"And she did so with her arm," said La Mole, "which means: 'Presently'—"

"She did so," said Coconnas, "which means: 'Go at once'—"

"The signal means: '*Wait for me.*'"

"It means: '*Away at once!*'"

"Well," said La Mole, "let each act on his own conviction. Do you go—I will remain."

Coconnas shrugged his shoulders and laid down on the grass. At the same moment, in the opposite direction from that which the queen had followed, but in the same alley, there passed, at top speed, a troop of horsemen, whom the two friends recognized as Protestants. They disappeared rapidly.

"Peste! the thing becomes serious," said Coconnas, rising. "Let us go to the Pavilion of Francois the First."

"No," replied La Mole; "by no means. If we are discovered, the attention of the king will be especially directed toward the pavilion, as that is the general rendezvous."——"Well, perhaps you are right," grumbled Coconnas.

Hardly had these words been uttered, than a horseman passed like a flash of lightning amid the trees, and leaping over ditches, bushes, briars, and all obstacles, reached the young men. He had a pistol in each hand, and guided his horse in his furious career with his knees only.

"M. de Mouy!" exclaimed Coconnas, uneasy, and now more on the alert than La Mole; "M. de Mouy flying!"

"Quick—quick!" cried the Huguenot; "away with you!—all is lost!—I have come round to tell you so, and now to horse and away!"

"And the queen!" cried La Mole.

But the voice of the young man was lost in the distance, and he neither heard nor replied.

Coconnas had soon made up his mind, while La Mole remained motionless, following De Mouy with his eyes, as he disappeared among the branches. He hastened to the horses, and leaping on his own, threw the bridle of the other to La Mole, and prepared to dash off. "Come, come!" he exclaimed, "Let us be off, as De Mouy advises, and De Mouy is a sensible man. Away, away, La Mole!"

"One moment," said La Mole; "we came here for something."

"Unless it is to get hanged," replied Coconnas, "I would advise you to lose no more time. I would only observe, that when M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale flies, all the world may flee too."

"M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale," said La Mole, "is not charged to carry off the Queen Marguerite! M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale does not love the Queen Marguerite!"

"Mordi! and he is quite right too! 'Corne de bœuf!' as King Charles says, we are conspiring, my dear fellow; and when men conspire, they should make off at the right time. Mount, mount, La Mole!"

"Well, well, let us then to horse and away!"

"That's right."

La Mole turned round to lay his hand on the pommel of his saddle; but at the moment when he put foot in the stirrup, a voice of command was heard, saying:

"Halt there—surrender!"

And at the same moment the figure of a man was seen behind an oak—then another—then thirty; they were the light dragoons dismounted, who were making their way quietly, and searching the forest.

"What did I tell you?" muttered Coconnas. The light dragoons were within thirty paces of the two friends.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Piedmontese, "what is your pleasure?"

The lieutenant desired his men to take aim at the two friends.

"Gentlemen," said Coconnas, drawing his sword, and raising it in the air, "we surrender; but allow me to inquire wherefore we are called on to do so?"

"That you must ask of the king of Navarre."

"What crime have we committed?"

"M. d'Alencon will inform you."

Coconnas and La Mole looked at each other. The name of their enemy at such a moment had very little to give them confidence. Yet they neither of them made any resistance. Coconnas was desired to alight from his horse, a maneuver which he executed without a word; then they were both placed in the center of the light dragoons, and took the route to the Pavilion of Francois I.

"You wished to see the Pavilion of Francois," said Coconnas to La Mole, when they saw through the trees the walls of a pretty Gothic building; "well, there it is."

La Mole made no reply, but only extended his hand to Coconnas. By the side of this beautiful pavilion, built in the time of Louis XII., and which was called after Francois, because he always made it a *rendezvous de chasse*, was a hut built for the huntsmen and prickers, and which was now nearly concealed by the muskets, halberds, and swords in front of it. The prisoners were conducted to this hut.

We will now throw a little light on the gloomy position of the two friends, by stating a few details. The Protestant gentlemen had assembled, as was agreed, in the Pavilion of Francois I., of which we know De Mouy had the key. Masters of the forest, as they believed, they had placed sentinels here and there, whom the light dragoons, having exchanged their white scarfs into red ones (a precaution due to the ingenious zeal of M. de Nancey), had laid hands upon without striking a blow.

The light dragoons continued their quest, keeping a good watch over the pavilion; but De Mouy, who, as we have

seen, was awaiting the king at the end of the Allée des Violettes, had seen these red scarfs stealing along, and instantly suspected them. He hastily concealed himself, and remarked the vast circle they made in order to beat the forest and hem in the place of rendezvous. At the same moment, at the bottom of the principal alley, he had seen the white aigrettes and bright arquebuses of the king's body-guard, and then the king himself, while in the opposite direction he observed the king of Navarre. Then he had made a sign of a cross with his hat, which was the signal agreed upon when all was lost. At this signal the king turned back, and rapidly disappeared. Then De Mouy, digging the two large rowels of his spurs into the sides of his horse, fled like the wind, and as he fled, gave those words of advice to La Mole and Coconnas which we have mentioned.

But the king, perceiving the absence of Henry and Marguerite, had arrived, escorted by D'Alencon, to see them both come from the hut, where he had desired all to be shut up who were found, not only in the pavilion, but in the forest.

D'Alencon, full of confidence, galloped close by the king, whose excessive pain increased his ill humor. Twice or thrice he had nearly fainted, and once had vomited blood.

"Quick, quick!" he said, when he arrived. "Make haste; I want to return to the Louvre. Draw these rebels out of their lair. This is Saint Blaise's day, and he was cousin to Saint Bartholomew."

At these words of the king, all the pikes and arquebuses were in motion, and they compelled the Huguenots arrested in the forest or the pavilion to come out of the hut one after the other. But the king of Navarre, Marguerite, and De Mouy were not among them.

"Well," said the king, "where is Henry—where is Margot? You promised them to me, D'Alencon, and, *corbœuf!* I must have them found."

"We have not seen the king and queen of Navarre, sire," said M. de Nancey.

"But here they come," observed Madame de Nevers.

And at the same moment, at the further extremity of an alley which led down to the river, appeared Henry and Marguerite, both as calm as if nothing had happened; both with their falcons on their wrist, and lovingly side by side on their horses, as they galloped along, while their steeds, like themselves, seemed to be caressing each other.

It was then that D'Alencon, furious, commanded the forest to be searched, and that La Mole and Coconnas were discovered.

They had reached the circle which the guards closed in; only, as they were not sovereigns, they could not assume so cool an appearance as Henry and Marguerite. La Mole was too pale, and Coconnas was too red.

CHAPTER LII.

THE EXAMINATIONS.

THE spectacle which presented itself to the friends, as they entered, was one of those that, once seen, is never forgotten.

As we have already said, Charles had anxiously observed each prisoner as, one by one, they left the piqueur's hut, watching, with an earnestness equal to that felt by D'Alencon, to see the king of Navarre come forth.

Both were doomed to disappointment; but, though thus out in their calculation, there still remained something to be done, and that was to find the cause of those being absent they counted upon finding there.

When, therefore, Henry and Marguerite were seen approaching from the end of an alley, a mortal paleness seized D'Alencon, while the breast of Charles seemed relieved from a load, and his heart beat with a hope that his friend Harry might yet disprove all that had been urged against him.

"He will escape again!" murmured Francois.

But at this moment the king was seized with such excruciating pains, such spasmodic agony throughout his frame, that, pressing a hand on each side, he shrieked aloud like a delirious man.

Henry hastened toward him, but by the

time he had traversed the short space that separated them, the paroxysm had passed away.

"From whence come you?" inquired the king, with a sternness of manner that frightened Marguerite.

"Nay, brother," replied she, as though the question had been applied to herself; "we have been joining in the chase."

"Had it been so, you would have pursued the river's side, instead of seeking the recesses of the forest."

"Sire," said Henry, "my falcon suddenly struck down a pheasant, at the very time we had stopped to look after the heron."

"Have you the bird?"

"Behold it, sire—as fine a bird as I have seen!" replied Henry, with the most perfect air of well-assumed innocence, as he held up his beautiful prize.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Charles; "but why did you not rejoin me when you had secured the pheasant?"

"Because the bird had directed his flight toward the park, sire; so that when we returned to the river's side, we saw you more than a mile off proceeding toward the forest. Therefore, having been permitted to join your majesty's chase, we did not like being thrown out, and proceeded to gallop after you as fast as we could."

"And were all these gentlemen invited also?" inquired Charles.

"What gentlemen?" inquired Henry, casting a look of inquiry around him.

"Pardieu!" exclaimed Charles; "why, your Huguenot friends. All I can say is, that they certainly cannot boast of my invitation to join our sport."

"Probably, sire," answered Henry, "they come at the bidding of M. d'Alencon."

"I?" said the Duke d'Alencon.

"Why, yes, brother," returned Henry; "did you not announce yourself yesterday as king of Navarre? What can be more natural than that the grateful people have assembled here to thank you for accepting the crown, and the king for giving it? Is it not so, gentlemen?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted forth a number of voices. "Long live the Duke d'Alencon! long live king Charles!"

"I am not king of the Huguenots!" said Francois, perfectly white with rage; and, looking stealthily at Charles, he added, "and trust I never shall be!"

"No matter," interposed Charles; "but you must be very sure, Henry, that I look upon all this as very strange."

"Sire," cried the king of Navarre, firmly, "Heaven pardon me for saying such a thing, but most persons would say I was undergoing an examination."

"And if it were so, how would you answer?"

"That I am a king like yourself," replied Henry, proudly; "for it is not the crown, but birth, that confers royalty; and that, though I would cheerfully answer any questions asked by my friend and brother, I should peremptorily refuse to reply to my judge."

"I only wish," muttered Charles, "that for once in my life I could hit upon what it was right to do."

"M. de Mouy is doubtless among those persons secured," cried the Duke d'Alencon. "Let him be brought before your majesty; we shall then know all we require."

"Is M. de Mouy among the prisoners?" inquired the king.

Henry felt a momentary uneasiness, and exchanged glances with Marguerite; but it was quickly dispersed. No voice answered to the inquiry after De Mouy.

"That individual is not among the parties arrested," said M. de Nancey; "some of my men fancy they saw him, but no one is certain on the subject."

An oath escaped from the lips of D'Alencon.

"Ha!" cried Marguerite, pointing to La Mole and Coconnas, who had heard all that had passed, and on whose wit and intelligence she felt sure she might reckon; "here, sire, are two gentlemen in the service of M. d'Alencon; question them—they will reply to you."

The duke felt the blow.

"I had them arrested purposely, to be enabled to prove that they neither of them belonged to me," answered the duke.

"HE SAW MARGUERITE LIFTING THE TAPESTRY."—*Page* 220.

The king contemplated the two friends, and started at seeing La Mole again.

"What! that Provencal here?" said he, frowning.

Coconnas bowed most respectfully.

"What were you doing when you were arrested?" asked Charles.

"Sire, myself and friend were busily engaged planning deeds of love and war."

"What, with horses ready saddled, armed to the teeth, and every preparation made for flight?"

"Not so, sire!" replied Coconnas; "your majesty is misinformed on this subject. We were lying beneath a sheltering beech, sub tegmine fagi, and might easily have ridden away had we entertained the slightest suspicion that we had been so unfortunate as to offend your majesty. Now, gentlemen," continued he, turning toward the light horsemen, "say, candidly and fairly, on your honor as soldiers, could we or could we not have escaped, had such been our desire?"

"Truth compels me to declare," answered the lieutenant, "that neither of these cavaliers made the slightest attempt at flight."

"Because, in all probability, their horses were too far off," chimed in the Duke d'Alencon.

"Your pardon, my lord duke," responded Coconnas, "but our horses could scarcely be nearer than they were—I being upon mine, and M. de la Mole holding his, in the very act of mounting."

"Is this correct?" inquired the king.

"Perfectly so," replied the lieutenant; "and more, upon seeing us approach, M. de Coconnas got off his horse."

Coconnas looked at the king with a sort of grim smile, that seemed to say, "There, you see!"

"But what did all those led horses, those mules laden with cases and packages, signify, then?" demanded Francois.

"How can we tell you?" replied Coconnas; "we are neither grooms nor squires. Ask these questions of the varlet who had charge of them."

"He is not to be found!" exclaimed the duke, almost frantic with rage.

"Most likely he was frightened, and ran away," retorted Coconnas; "one cannot expect a clown to have the notions or manners of a gentleman."

"Still the same system," said D'Alencon, gnashing his teeth; "fortunately, sire, I told you beforehand that neither of these persons had been in my service for some days past."

"Is it possible," cried Coconnas, "that I have the misfortune no longer to form part of your highness's retinue?"

"Morbleu! monsieur, why affect ignorance on this subject, when you yourself gave in your dismissal in a letter so impertinent that I have thought proper to preserve it, and happily have it about me."

"I confess," said Coconnas, "I had flattered myself with the hope of being forgiven for writing that letter, under the first influence of vexation at learning that your highness had endeavored to strangle my friend La Mole in one of the corridors of the Louvre."

"What is that he says?" interrupted the king.

"At first I thought your highness was alone in the affair; but afterward I learned that three other persons—"

"Silence!" exclaimed Charles, "we have heard enough." Then, turning to the king of Navarre, he said, "Henry, your word not to escape."

"I give it to your majesty."

"Return to Paris with M. de Nancey, and remain in your chamber under arrest. As for you, messieurs," continued he, speaking to the two friends, "give up your swords."

La Mole looked at Marguerite, who smiled; the young man immediately delivered his sword to the nearest officer. Coconnas following his friend's example.

"Has M. de Mouy been found?" inquired the king.

"No, sire," answered M. de Nancey; "either he was not in the forest, or he has escaped."

"So much the worse," rejoined Charles; "but let us return to Paris. I am cold, and my head seems dizzy."

"'Tis anger that excites you, sire," observed Francois.

"It may be; but my eyes seem troubled. Where are the prisoners? I cannot distinguish anything. Is it so soon dark? Oh, mercy! help—help—I die!—I die!"

So saying, the unfortunate king let go the reins of his horse, and fell backward, wildly stretching forth his hands; while his terrified courtiers, alarmed at this sudden seizure, prevented him from falling.

Standing apart from the clustering nobles, Francois wiped the cold drops from his brow; for he alone of all the company knew the cause of Charles's violent attack.

The king was now quite insensible. A litter was brought, and he being extended on it, was covered with a cloak taken from the shoulders of one of his attendants.

The melancholy procession then proceeded toward Paris, in a very different frame of mind to that in which it had departed thence in the morning. Then, a merry, jocund party had set forth, consisting of conspirators whose hearts beat high with hope, and a joyous monarch, promising himself many such days of princely enjoyment: their return displayed a dying king surrounded by rebel prisoners.

Marguerite, who throughout all this had not for an instant lost her self-possession, gave her husband a look of intelligence, then, passing so close to La Mole that he was enabled to catch the two brief words she uttered, she said:

"*Me deide.*" ("Fear nothing.")

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed the captain of light horse, "we are ready to start."

"Would it be a liberty," inquired Coconnas, "to ask where we are going to?"

"I believe to Vincennes," replied the lieutenant.

"I would rather be going anywhere else," answered Coconnas; "but people are sometimes obliged to do things against their will."

The king recovered his senses during the journey, and even a portion of his strength: he declared himself equal to remounting his horse, but that was not permitted.

"Let Maitre Ambroise Pare be immediately summoned," said Charles, as he reached the Louvre. Then, descending from his litter, he walked slowly toward his apartments, leaning on the arm of Tavannes, and strictly forbidding any persons following him.

All had observed his extreme gravity of look and manner. During the journey homeward, he had appeared lost in reflection, not addressing a word to those around him. Still it was evident, that the recently discovered conspiracy formed no part of his thoughts, but that he was solely occupied with his own illness—a malady so strange, so sudden and severe, and the symptoms of which reminded the spectators of those visible in the last sickness of Francois II.

Arrived at his chamber, Charles seated himself on a species of chaise-longue, and supported his head on the cushions: then, reflecting that there might be some little delay ere the arrival of Maitre Ambroise Pare, he determined to employ the intermediate space as well as he could. He clapped his hands—a guard appeared.

"Let the king of Navarre be informed I desire to speak with him," said Charles.

The man bowed and departed.

Again was the king visited by a repetition of the distressing sufferings he had previously undergone; his head fell back; his ideas seemed crowded and confused, till he could not separate one from the other; a sort of blood-colored vapor seemed to float before his eyes; his mouth was parched, and he fruitlessly sought to slake the burning thirst by which he was consumed by swallowing the contents of a carafe of water.

During the almost lethargic state into which Charles had sunk, a sudden noise was heard of approaching footsteps; the door rolled back on its hinges, and Henry stood before him.

"You sent for me, sire," said he. "I am here."

The sound of the well-known voice effectively roused Charles, who, raising his languid head mechanically, held out his hand to Henry.

"Sire," observed Henry, whose arms

hung beside him, without any attempt to imitate the offered cordiality on the part of the king, "your majesty forgets that I am no longer your brother, but your prisoner."

"True, true," answered Charles, "and I thank you for having reminded me of it; but was there not also some promise on your part, when we last spoke together, to answer me candidly whatever questions I might put to you?"

"I did so pledge myself to your majesty, and I am ready to keep my word."

The king poured some water into the palm of his hand and applied it to his temples.

"First, then," said he, "tell me truly, Henry, how much of the charge brought against you by the Duke d'Alencon is correct?"

"Half of it. It was M. d'Alencon who was to have fled, and I who was to have accompanied him."

"And why should you have done so, Henry? Are you dissatisfied with my conduct toward you?"

"Far from it, sire. Your majesty is all goodness; and that God, to whom the secrets of all men's hearts are known, knows well how truly and affectionately I love and honor my king and brother."

"Yet," said Charles, "methinks 'tis not usual to fly from those we love, and who love us."

"Your majesty is right in so believing; but 'twas not from those I loved I sought to escape, but from such as hated me, and desired my ruin. Am I permitted to speak openly?"

"You are—proceed."

"The persons whose animosity I dreaded and wished to fly from were M. d'Alencon and the queen-mother."

"As for M. d'Alencon, I will not say you are wrong; but the queen-mother loads you with attentions."

"And 'tis precisely for that reason I mistrust her; and a very good thing it is I was on my guard."

"Against the queen-mother?"

"Ay, the queen-mother, or those who are about her. Now, will your majesty tell me as candidly as I have answered the questions put to me, whether my life is of any value in your eyes?"

"I should be miserable if any harm were to befall you."

"Well, then, I can assure your majesty you have twice very narrowly escaped being made miserable on my account. Twice has Providence interposed in my behalf. Certainly, upon one occasion Providence thought fit to assume the features of your majesty."

"And who was your preserver upon the other occasion?"

"A very unlikely person to be selected as a providential agent for good: no other than Rene."

"And what did he for you?"

"He saved me from poison."

"You have all the luck, Harry!" murmured poor Charles, faintly smiling; but the feeble attempt was quickly dispelled by the sharp spasmodic contraction of returning suffering.

The king wiped his brow, and signed to Henry to proceed.

"Well, sire," said Henry, "have I spoken out as boldly as you desired? Is there anything else you are desirous of questioning me upon?"

"Harry, you are a good and faithful fellow. Tell me this—do you apprehend any further attempts on your life or honor on the part of your enemies?"

"I can but assure you, that when evening comes, I am always surprised to find myself still in existence."

"It is because they see I love you, they are thus bitter: but make yourself quite easy. They shall meet with their just reward; meanwhile, you are free."

"To quit Paris?" asked Henry.

"No, no! You are well aware I cannot possibly do without you. *Mille noms d'un diable!* I must have some one to love me, surely."

"Then if your majesty prefers keeping me with you, at least grant me one favor."

"What is that?"

"Not to entertain me as a friend, but to detain me as a prisoner."

"A prisoner, Harry!"

"Nay, does not your majesty see plainly

enough that it is your friendship that brings all my troubles and disasters on me?"

"And you would prefer my hatred?"

"I would only desire your feigned dislike, sire. An outward manifestation of displeasure on your part will save me from any further persecution from those who will esteem me of too little consequence to merit their hostility, directly they believe you have disgraced and dismissed me from favor—but your majesty is still suffering from your recent attack; I can perceive the efforts you are making to conceal it. Permit me to summon the necessary aid."

"I have sent for Maître Ambroise Pare."

"Then I shall retire more satisfied."

"Upon my soul," said the king, "I verily believe you are the only person in the world who really loves me!"

"Is such your opinion, sire?"

"It is, on the word of a gentleman."

"Then I pray you to command me to the strict keeping of M. de Nancey, as a man your extreme anger may doom to death ere a month is past. By that means you will have me to love you for many years."

"M. de Nancey!" cried Charles. The captain of the guards entered. "M. de Nancey," said Charles, "I here commit to your keeping the most guilty man in my kingdom; you will answer for him with your life."

The officer bowed low; and with a well-feigned air of consternation, Henry followed his self-solicited keeper from the apartment.

CHAPTER LIII.

ACTÆON.

CHARLES was alone, and much astonished not to have seen one or other of his faithful attendants—his nurse Madeleine and his greyhound Actæon.

"Nurse has gone to sing her psalms with some Huguenot of her acquaintance," he said to himself; "and Actæon is still angry with me for the blow I gave him with my whip this morning."

Charles then took a wax candle, and went into the nurse's apartment: she was not there, and he passed on into his armory; but as he went forward, one of those agonies he had already experienced, and which came on him suddenly, seized him. He suffered as if his entrails were perforated with a hot iron; an unquenchable thirst consumed him, and seeing a cup of milk on the table, he swallowed it at a draught, and then felt somewhat easier, and entered the armory.

To his great astonishment, Actæon did not come to meet him—had he been shut up? In that case, he would have known that his master had returned from hunting, and howled to rejoin him.

Charles called — whistled — the animal did not appear.

He advanced four paces, and as the light of the wax candle threw its beams to the angle of the cabinet, he saw, in the corner, a large mass extended on the floor.

"Halo! Actæon, halo!" said Charles, whistling again.

The dog never stirred; Charles hastened forward, and touched him: the poor brute was stiff and cold. From his throat, contracted by pain, several drops of humor had fallen, mingled with a foamy and bloody slaver. The dog had found in the cabinet an old cap of his master's, and had died with his head resting on something that represented a friend.

At this spectacle, which made him forget his own sufferings, and restored him to all his energy, rage boiled in Charles's veins: he would have cried out, but, encompassed in their greatness as they are, kings are not free to yield to that first impulse which every man turns to the profit of his passion or his defense: Charles reflected that there might be some treason here, and was silent.

Then he knelt before his dog, and examined the dead carcase with an experienced eye. The eye was glassy, the tongue red, and covered with pustules; it was a strange disease, and made Charles shudder.

The king put on his gloves, opened the livid lips of the dog to examine the teeth,

and remarked, in the interstices, some white-looking fragments clinging about the points of his sharp teeth. He took these fragments out, and at once recognized that they were paper; near where the paper was the inflammation was more violent, the gums more swollen, and the skin as if eaten by vitriol.

Charles looked around him attentively. On the carpet were lying several pieces of paper similar to that which he had already recognized in the dog's throat; one of the bits, larger than the others, presented the marks of an engraving on wood. Charles's hair stood erect on his head; he recognized a fragment of the engraving which represented a gentleman hawking, and it was that which Actæon had torn out of the book.

"Ah," said he, turning pale, "the book was poisoned!" Then, suddenly calling up his recollections, "*Mille demons!* I touched every page with my finger, and at every page I raised my finger to my lips to moisten it. These faintings—these agonies—these vomitings!—I am a dead man!"

Charles remained for an instant motionless under the weight of this frightful idea; then, raising himself with a hoarse groan, he went hastily toward the door.

"Let some one go instantly, and with all dispatch," he cried, "to Maitre Rene, and bring him here in ten minutes. If Maitre Ambroise Pare arrives, desire him to wait." A guard went instantly to obey the king's commands.

"Ah," muttered Charles, "if I put everybody to the torture, I will learn who gave this book to Harry!" and with the perspiration on his brow, his hands clenched, his breast heaving, Charles remained with his eyes fixed on the body of his dead dog. Ten minutes afterward, the Florentine rapped timidly at the door. "Enter!" said Charles.

The perfumer appeared, and Charles went up toward him with an imperious air and compressed lip.

"Your majesty desired to see me," said Rene, trembling.

"Yes; you are a skillful chemist, are you not?"

"Sire—"

"And know all that the most skillful doctors know?"

"Your majesty is pleased to flatter me."

"No, my mother tells me so; and besides, I have confidence in you, and had rather consult you than any one else. Look!" he continued, pointing to the carcase of the dead dog; "I beg you to look at that animal's mouth, and tell me of what death he has died."

While Rene, with a wax candle in his hand, was stooping down to the ground, as much to hide his emotion as to obey the king, Charles, standing up, with his eyes fixed on him, awaited with a feverish expectation, easily to be imagined, the reply, which would be his sentence of death or his assurance of safety.

Rene drew a kind of scalpel from his pocket, opened it, and, with the point, detached from the dog's throat the morsels of paper adhering to the gums, looking long and attentively to the humor and blood which distilled from each wound.

"Sire," he said, in a tremulous voice, "here are very sad symptoms."

Charles felt an icy shudder run through his veins, and to his very heart.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "the dog has been poisoned, has he not?"

"I fear so, sire."

"And with what sort of poison?"

"I think a mineral poison."

"Can you ascertain to a certainty whether or not he has been poisoned?"

"Yes, on opening and examining the stomach."

"Open it, then, as I wish to be assured on the point."

"I must call some one to assist me."

"I will assist you," said Charles; "and if he has been poisoned, what symptoms shall we find?"

"Red blotches and herborizations in the stomach."

"Come, then, to work!"

Rene, with one stroke of the scalpel, opened the hound's body, while Charles, with one knee on the ground, lighted him with clenched and convulsive hand.

"See, sire," said Rene; "see, here are certain marks; here are the red blotches

I mentioned, and these veins, turgid with blood, like the roots of certain plants, are what I meant by herborizations. I find here every symptom I anticipated."

"And the dog is assuredly poisoned?"

"Unquestionably, sire."

"With mineral poison?"

"According to every appearance."

"And what would be a man's symptoms, who by accident had swallowed such poison?"

"Great pains in the head, a feeling of burning in the stomach, as if he had swallowed hot coals, pains in the bowels, and vomiting."

"Would he be thirsty?" asked Charles.

"Parchingly thirsty."

"'Tis so, then—'tis so, then," muttered the king; and aloud he asked, "What is the antidote to administer to a man who had swallowed the same substance as my dog?"

Rene reflected an instant. "There are many mineral poisons," he replied, "and I should like to know precisely which your majesty means. Has your majesty any idea of the mode in which the poison was conveyed to the dog?"

"Yes," said Charles; "he has eaten the leaf of a book."

"The leaf of a book?"

"Yes."

"And has your majesty got that book?"

"Here it is," was Charles's answer, taking the hunting-book from the shelf where he had placed it, and handing it to Rene, who gave a start of surprise, which did not escape the king.

"He has eaten a leaf of this book?" stammered Rene.

"Yes, this one;" and Charles pointed out the torn leaf.

"Allow me to tear out another, sire."

"Do so."

Rene tore out a leaf, held it in the wax candle, and when it caught light, a strong smell of garlic diffused itself through the apartment. "He has been poisoned with a preparation of arsenic," he said.

"You are sure?"

"As if I had prepared it myself."

"And the antidote?" Rene shook his head.

"What!" said Charles, in a hoarse voice, "do you know no remedy?"

"The best and most efficacious is white of eggs beaten in milk; but—"

"But what?"

"It must be instantly administered; if not—"

"If not—"

"It is a subtle poison, sire," replied Rene.

"Yet it does not kill at once," said Charles.

"No, but it kills surely: no matter as to the length of time the person is in dying, though sometimes that may be reduced to a calculation."

Charles leaned on the marble table. "Now," said he, touching Rene on the shoulder, "you know this book."

"I, sire!" replied Rene, turning pale.

"Yes, you; for you betrayed yourself as you looked at it."

"Sire, I swear to you—"

"Listen to me, Rene, and listen attentively. You poisoned the queen of Navarre with gloves; you poisoned the Prince de Porcian with the smoke of a lamp; you tried to poison M. de Conde with a scented apple. Rene, I will have your flesh torn off your bones, shred by shred, with red-hot pincers, if you do not tell me to whom this book belongs."

The Florentine saw that he must not trifle with Charles's anger, and resolved to reply with audacity.

"And if I tell the truth, sire, who will guarantee me from not being more cruelly tortured than if I hold my tongue?"

"I will."

"Will you give me your royal word?"

"On my honor as a gentleman, your life shall be spared," said the king.

"Then this book belongs to me."

"To you?" replied Charles, starting, and gazing on him with bewildered eye.

"Yes, to me."

"And how did it leave your hands?"

"Her majesty the queen-mother took it from my house."

"The queen-mother?" said Charles.

"Yes."

"And with what intention?"

"With the intention, as I believe, of

having it sent to the king of Navarre, who had inquired of the Duke d'Alencon for a book of this description to study hawking from."

"Ah!" said Charles, "and is that it? I understand it all. This book, indeed, was in Harry's chamber. There is a destiny, and I submit to it."

At this moment, Charles was seized with a cough so dry and violent as to agonize him, and bring on a fresh attack of pain in the stomach; he uttered two or three stifled groans, and fell into a chair.

"What ails you, sire?" asked René, alarmed.

"Nothing," said Charles, "except great thirst. Give me something to drink."

Rene poured out a glass of water, and presented it to Charles, who swallowed it at a draught.

"Now," said he, taking a pen, and dropping it into the ink, "write in this book."

"What shall I write?"

"What I dictate: 'This book on hawking was given by me to the queen-mother, Catherine de Medicis. RENE.'"

The Florentine wrote and signed as he was commanded.

"You promised my life should be saved," said Rene.

"And on my part I will keep my word."

"But," said Rene, "as to the queen-mother!"

"Oh," replied Charles, "that I have nothing to do with. If you are attacked, defend yourself."

"Sire, may I quit France when I find my life menaced?"

"I will reply to that in fifteen days hence; in the meantime—"

And Charles frowningly placed his finger on his livid lips.

"Rely on me, sire," said Rene, who, too happy to escape so well, bowed, and left the room.

Behind him the nurse appeared at her chamber door.

"What is the matter, my Charlot?" she inquired.

"Nurse, I have been walking in the dew, and it has given me cold."

"You look very pale, Charlot."

"And feel very weak. Give me your arm, nurse, and help me to bed;" and leaning on her, Charles went to his chamber.

"Now," said Charles, "I will put myself to bed."

"And if Maitre Ambroise Pare comes?"

"You must tell him I am better, and do not want him."

"But, meanwhile, what will you take?"

"Oh, a very simple medicine—whites of eggs beaten in milk. By the way, nurse, poor Actæon is dead; to-morrow morning have him buried in a corner of the garden of the Louvre; he was one of my best friends, and I will raise a tomb over him, if I have time."

CHAPTER LIV.

VINCENNES.

ACCORDING to the order given by Charles IX., Henry was the same evening conducted to Vincennes, that famous castle of which only a fragment now remains, but colossal enough to give an idea of its past grandeur.

At the postern of the prison they stopped. M. de Nancey alighted from his horse, opened the gate closed with a padlock, and respectfully invited the king to follow him. Henry obeyed without a word of reply. Every abode seemed to him more safe than the Louvre, and ten doors closing on him at the same time, were between him and Catherine de Medicis.

The royal prisoner crossed the drawbridge between two soldiers, passed the three doors on the ground floor and the three doors at the foot of the staircase, and then, still preceded by M. de Nancey, went up one flight of stairs. Arrived there, Captain de Nancey requested the king to follow him through a kind of corridor, at the extremity of which was a very large and gloomy chamber.

Henry looked around him with considerable disquietude.

"Where are we?" he inquired.

"In the chamber of torture, monseigneur."

"Ah, ah!" replied the king, looking at it attentively.

There was something of everything in this apartment: pitchers and trestles for the torture by water; wedges and mallets for the question of the boot; moreover, there were stone benches for the unhappy wretches who awaited the question, nearly all round the chamber; and above these seats, and to the seats themselves, and at the foot of these seats, were iron rings, mortiсed into the walls with no symmetry but that of the torturing art.

"Ah, ah!" said Henry, "is this the way to my apartment?"

"Yes, monseigneur, and here it is," said a figure in the dark, who approached and then became distinguishable.

Henry thought he recognized the voice, and advancing toward the individual, said: "Ah! is it you, Beaulieu? And what the devil do you do here?"

"Sire, I have been nominated governor of the fortress of Vincennes."

"Well, my dear sir, your debut does you honor; a king for a prisoner is no bad commencement."

"Pardon me, sire, but before I received you I had already received two gentlemen."

"Who may they be? Ah, your pardon! Perhaps I commit an indiscretion?"

"Monseigneur, I have not been bound to secrecy. They are M. de la Mole and M. de Coconnas."

"Poor gentlemen! And where are they?"

"High up; on the fourth floor."

Henry gave a sigh. It was there he wished to be.

"Now, then, M. de Beaulieu," said Henry, "have the kindness to show me my chamber. I am desirous of reaching it, as I am very much fatigued with my day's toil."

"Here, monseigneur," said Beaulieu, showing Henry an open door.

"No. 2!" said Henry, "and why not No. 1?"

"Because it is reserved, monseigneur."

"Ah, that is another thing," said Henry, and he became even more pensive. He wondered who was to occupy No. 1.

The governor, with a thousand apologies, installed Henry in his apartment, made many excuses for his deficiencies, and placing two soldiers at the door, retired.

"Now," said the governor, addressing the turnkey, "let us visit the others."

The turnkey preceded him, and traversing the Salle de Question, they again passed the corridor, and reaching the staircase, M. de Beaulieu followed his guide up three pair of stairs. On reaching the fourth story, the turnkey opened successively three doors, each ornamented with two locks and three enormous bolts. He had scarcely touched the third door than they heard a joyous voice, which exclaimed:

"Eh, mordi! open, if it be only to give us a little air! Your stove is so warm, that it stifles me here."

"One moment, my gentleman," said the turnkey; "I have not come to let you out, but to come in to you with the governor."

"M. the governor does me great honor," replied Coconnas, "and is most welcome."

M. de Beaulieu then entered, and answered Coconnas's cordial smile by one of those icy politenesses which belong to governors of fortresses, jailers, and executioners.

"Have you any money, sir?" he inquired of his prisoner.

"I?" replied Coconnas. "Not a crown."

"Jewels?"

"I have a ring."

"Allow me to search you."

"Mordi!" cried Coconnas, reddening with anger.

"We must suffer everything for the service of the king!"

"Humph!" replied the Piedmontese, "they who rob on the Pont-Neuf are, then, like you, in the service of the king. Mordi! I have been very unjust, sir; for until now I had taken them for thieves."

"Sir, good-day!" said Beaulieu. "Jailer, lock the door!"

The governor went away, taking with him the ring, a beautiful sapphire which Madame de Nevers had given to Coconnas to remind him of the color of her eyes.

"Now for the other," he said, as he went out.

They crossed an empty apartment, and the game of three doors, six locks, and nine bolts, was played all over again. The last door being opened, a sigh was the first sound that saluted the visitors. The chamber was even more gloomy than the one which M. de Beaulieu had just quitted. La Mole was seated in a corner, his head resting on his hand, and in spite of the visit and the visitors, was as motionless as if he did not observe them.

"Good-evening, M. de la Mole," said Beaulieu.

The young man raised his head slowly.

"Good-evening, sir," he replied.

"Sir," continued Beaulieu, "I have come to search you."

"It is useless," replied La Mole; "I will give you all I have."

"What have you?"

"About three hundred crowns, these jewels, these rings."

La Mole turned out his pockets, stripped his fingers, and took the clasp out of his hat. "Have you nothing more?"

"Not that I know of."

"And that silk cord round your neck, what may that be?" asked the governor.

"Sir, it is not a jewel; it is a relic."

"You must give it to me."

"Really, do you require it? Well, then, sir, here it is."

Then turning away, as if to approach the light, he unfastened the pretended relic, which was in fact a medallion containing a portrait. The latter he took out of its case, pressed it to his lips, and having kissed it many times, pretended to drop it accidentally, and placing the heel of his boot upon it, crushed it to atoms.

"Sir," said Beaulieu, when he saw the miniature literally ground to dust, "I shall complain of this to the king."

And without taking leave of his prisoner in a single word, he withdrew so angry that he left the turnkey to fasten the doors. The jailer advanced a few paces, and observing that M. de Beaulieu had already descended several stairs, he said, turning to La Mole:

"Ma foi! sir, it was very well you gave me the hundred crowns at once, for which I am to give you leave to see and talk with your companion; for if you had not, the governor would have taken them with the other three hundred, and my conscience would then not have allowed me to do anything for you; but I have been paid in advance, and have promised you shall see your comrade, and an honest man always keeps his word: only, if you can avoid it, for your own sake as well as mine, do not talk politics."

La Mole came forth from his apartment, and found himself face to face with Coconnas, who was walking up and down the flags of the intermediate chamber. The two friends threw themselves into each other's arms. The jailer pretended to wipe the corner of his eye, and then withdrew, to watch that the prisoners were not surprised, or rather, himself not suspected.

"Ah, 'tis you, then!" said Coconnas. "Has that brute of a governor visited you?"

"Yes, and you too, I presume?"

"And taken everything from you?"

"And from you too, eh?"

"Oh, I had not much—only a ring Henriette gave me."

"Have you any idea what has happened?"

"Perfectly; we have been betrayed."

"By whom?"

"By that scoundrelly Duke d'Alencon. I should have been right to twist his neck, you see."

"And do you think our position is serious?"

"I am afraid so."

"Then we may have to anticipate the torture?"

"I have already thought so."

"And what shall you do in that case?"

"And you?"

"I shall be silent," replied La Mole, with a fevered blush, "if I can."

"And I," said Coconnas, "will tell them a few things they do not expect."

"What things?" asked La Mole, eagerly.

"Oh, be easy—things that will prevent

M. d'Alencon from sleeping quietly for some time."

La Mole was about to reply, when the jailer, who no doubt heard some noise, came suddenly into the chamber, and pushing each into his respective dungeon, locked them in again.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FIGURE OF WAX.

FOR a week Charles was confined to his bed by a slow fever, interrupted by fits like epilepsy. During these attacks his cries were terrible; then, when they were over, he sank back exhausted into the arms of his nurse. Henry was shut up in his chamber at the prison, and, at his own request to Charles, no one was allowed to see him, not even Marguerite. Catherine and D'Alencon thought him lost: Henry himself ate and drank more at his ease, hoping he was forgotten. At court no one suspected the real cause of the king's illness. Maitre Ambroise Pare and Mazille, his colleague, believed it to be inflammation of the coats of the stomach, and had prescribed a regimen which aided the operation of the drink prescribed by Rene, and which Charles received thrice a day from the hands of his nurse: it was the only nourishment he took.

La Mole and Coconnas were at Vincennes in close confinement. Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had made several attempts to see them or to send them a letter, but in vain.

One morning Charles felt rather better, and ordered the court should be admitted. The doors were accordingly opened, and it was easy to see, by his pale cheeks and the feverish glare of his eyes, what great ravages disease had made on the young king.

Catherine, D'Alencon, and Marguerite were informed that the king gave audience. They all three entered at a short interval one after the other: Catherine calm, D'Alencon smiling, Marguerite dejected: Catherine sat down by the side of the bed without remarking the look Charles gave her; D'Alencon stood at the foot; Marguerite leaned against a table. On seeing her brother thus worn by illness, she could not repress a sigh and a tear.

Charles, whom nothing escaped, saw the tear and heard the sigh, and made a motion of his head to Marguerite, unseen by all but her. This sign, slight as it was, gave courage to the poor queen, to whom Henry had not had time, or perhaps had not chosen, to say anything. She feared for her husband, she trembled for her lover. For herself she had no fear; she knew La Mole too well not to feel that she might fully rely upon him.

"Well, my dear son," said Catherine, "how are you now?"

"Better, madame, better."

"And what say the physicians?"

"Oh, my physicians, they are very clever fellows," cried Charles, bursting into a discordant laugh; "I have great amusement in listening to their discussions about my malady."

"What my brother wants," observed Francois, "is to take the fresh air. The chase, which he is so fond of, would do him good."

"And yet," replied Charles, with a singular smile, "the last did me a great deal of harm."

Then, with an inclination of his head, he signified to the courtiers that the audience was at an end. D'Alencon bowed and withdrew. Marguerite seized Charles's wasted hand and kissed it tenderly, then left the apartment.

"Dear Margot!" murmured Charles.

Catherine remained; and Charles, seeing her alone with him, recoiled as if from a serpent. He knew to whom and to what his death was attributable. "Why do you stay, madame?" asked he with a shudder.

"I wish to speak to you of important matters, my son," returned Catherine.

"Speak, madame," said Charles.

"Sire, you said just now your doctors were very skillful."

"I say so still."

"Well—I suspect that, clever as they are, they know nothing at all about your disorder."——"Really, madame?"

"And that they treat the symptoms, instead of treating the cause."

"On my soul," replied Charles, astonished, "I think you are right!"

"Well, my son," continued Catherine, "as it is essential for my happiness and for the welfare of the kingdom you should be cured as speedily as possible, I have assembled all the men skilled, not only in curing the diseases of the body, but those of the mind."

"What was the result?"

"That which I expected; I have the remedy that will cure not only your body, but your mind."

Charles trembled; he thought that his mother intended to give him a fresh poison, finding the first too slow in operation.

"Where is this remedy?" asked he.

"In the disease itself."

"Where is that situated?"

"Listen, my son," said the queen. "Did you never hear of secret enemies, who from a distance assassinate their victim?"

"By steel or poison?" demanded Charles, without changing the expression of his countenance.

"My son," asked the Florentine, "do you believe in magic?"

"Fully," returned Charles, repressing a smile of incredulity.

"Well, then," continued Catherine, "from magic proceed all your sufferings. An enemy, who dared not attack you openly, has done so in secret; a terrible conspiracy, the more terrible that it was without accomplices, has been directed against your majesty."

"Oh, oh," said Charles.

"You doubt it, perhaps; but I know it for a certainty."

"I never doubt what you tell me," replied the king, sarcastically. "I am curious to know how they have sought to kill me."

"By magic."

"Explain yourself."

"If the conspirator I mean, and whom your majesty suspects already in your mind, had succeeded, there would have been no trace, but happily your brother watched over you."

"What brother?"

"D'Alencon."

"Ah! true," said Charles, with a bitter laugh, "I forgot I had a brother. Well, continue, madame."

"He fortunately discovered the clew to the conspirator."

"Ah! I suppose you mean the king of Navarre, mother?" replied Charles, wishing to see how far her dissimulation would go.

Catherine hypocritically cast down her eyes.

"I have had him arrested and sent to Vincennes for his escapade," continued the king. "Is he more culpable than I suspected, then?"

"Do you feel the fever that consumes you?" asked Catherine.

"Yes," replied Charles, his brow darkening.

"Do you feel the fire that burns your stomach?"

"Aye, madame."

"Do you feel the shooting pains in your head?"

"Yes; how exactly you understand the symptoms."

"Well, look here."

And she drew from under her mantle a little figure. The figure was of yellow wax, about ten inches high, clothed in a robe covered with golden stars, also of wax, and over this a royal mantle of the same material.

"What is this statue?" asked Charles.

"See what it has on the head," said Catherine.

"A crown," replied Charles.

"And in the heart—"

"A needle."

"Well—"

"Well, do you recognize yourself?"

"Myself!"

"Yes, in your royal robes, with the crown on your head."

"And who made this figure?" asked the king, weary of the miserable farce. "The king of Navarre, of course."

"No, sire."

"No; then I do not understand you."

"I say *no*," replied Catherine, "because you may ask the question literally: had you put it in a different manner, I should have answered yes."

Charles made no answer.

"Sire," continued she, "this statue was found by the attorney-general, Laguesle, in the apartment of the man who led a horse for the king of Navarre on the day of the hawking party."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Himself. Now look at the needle in the heart, and the name written on the label attached to it."

"I see an M," returned Charles.

"That means '*mort*;' it is the magic formula."

"So, then, the person who seeks to kill me is M. de la Mole?" said Charles.

"Yes, he is the poniard; but behind the poniard is the hand that directs it."

"This, then, is the cause of my illness? What must now be done? for you know that, unlike you, I know nothing of charms and spells."

"The death of the conspirator destroys the charm. Its power ceases with his life."

"Really."

"Did you not know that?"

"I am no sorcerer."

"But now you are convinced, are you not, of the cause of your illness?"

"Completely."

"You do not say so out of complaisance?"

"Oh, no! from the bottom of my heart."

"Heaven be praised," said Catherine.

"Yes, Heaven be praised," repeated Charles, ironically. "I know the cause of my illness, and whom to punish."

"And you will punish—"

"M. de la Mole; you say he is the guilty party."

"I say he is the instrument."

"Well, we will begin with him, and if he has an accomplice, he will confess."

"If he does not," muttered Catherine, "I have infallible means of making him. You will then, sire, permit the process to commence?"

"I desire it, madame, and the sooner the better."

Catherine pressed her son's hand, not at all understanding the nervous pressure with which he returned it, and left the apartment without hearing his sardonic laugh, or the terrible imprecation which followed that laugh. At this moment he heard a rustling noise, and, turning round, saw Marguerite lifting the tapestry of the door of the nurse's apartments.

"Oh, sire, sire!" cried Marguerite, "you know what *she* says is false."

"*She!* Who?" said Charles.

"Oh, Charles! it is terrible to accuse one's mother; I knew she was staying only to persecute him, but I swear to you, by all I hold sacred, that what she says is false."

"Whom does she persecute?"

"Henry, your own Henry, who loves you, and is devoted to you."

"You think so, Margot?"

"I am sure of it."

"And so am I."

"Why, then, did you arrest him, and send him to Vincennes?" said Marguerite.

"Oh, he has singular ideas; perhaps he is wrong, perhaps he is right; but he thought he should be more safe in disgrace than in favor, at Vincennes than in the Louvre, and so he asked me to arrest him."

"Is he safe?"

"As safe as a man can be, for whose life Beaulieu answers with his own."

"Oh, thanks! but—"

"But what?"

"There is another person in whose welfare I am interested."

"Who is this person?"

"Sire, spare me; I scarce dare name him to my brother, much less to my king."

"M. de la Mole, is it not?"

"Alas! sire, you wished once before to kill him, and he only escaped by a miracle."

"He had committed but one crime then, now he has committed two."

"Ah! he is not guilty of the second."

"But do you know what our mother says?"

"I have already told you what she says is false."

"Do you not know that a figure dressed in royal robes, and pierced to the heart, has been seized at De la Mole's?"

"I know it, but it was the figure of a woman, not of a man."

"And the needle—"

"Was a charm to make himself beloved by a woman, not to kill a man."

"What was the name of this woman?"

"MARGUERITE!" cried the queen, casting herself at Charles's bedside, and bathing his hand with tears.

"Silence, Margot," said Charles, "you may, in your turn, be overheard."

"Oh, no matter!" cried the queen. "If all the world were present to hear me, I would declare it infamous to abuse the love of a gentleman by staining his reputation with a charge of murder."

"What if I knew the real author of the crime?"

"Brother—"

"That it was not La Mole."

"You know then—"

"The real author of the crime."

"There has been a crime committed, then?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Look at me."

Marguerite obeyed, and shuddered as she saw him so pale.

"I have not three months to live!"

"*You*, my brother!"

"Margot, I am poisoned!"

Marguerite screamed.

"Silence," said Charles; "it must be thought I die by magic."

"You know who is guilty?"

"Yes."

"Who is it? D'Alencon?"

"Perhaps."

"Or," Marguerite whispered, as if alarmed at what she was going to say, "our mother?"

Charles remained silent. Marguerite, however, read the answer in his eye, and sank into a chair.

"My God!" murmured she. "It is impossible!"

"Impossible?" said Charles. "It is a pity Rene is not here."

"Rene?"

"Yes; he would tell you all about it: 'twas a book he lent to his mistress that was poisoned, and that has poisoned me. But this must be hidden from the world, and that it may be so, it must be believed I die of magic, and by the agency of him they accuse."

"But it is monstrous!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Pardon! pardon! You know he is innocent!"

"I know it, but the world must believe him guilty. Let your lover die: his death alone can save the honor of our family. I myself die that the secret may be preserved."

Marguerite saw her only hope lay in her own resources, and withdrew, weeping. Meantime, Catherine had lost not an instant, but had written to Laguesle the following historical letter, which we give word for word, and which throws a considerable light on this bloody drama:

"M. LE PROCUREUR—I have this evening been informed for certain that La Mole has committed sacrilege; many ill books and papers have been found in his apartments in Paris; see, therefore, the chief president, and inform him of the whole affair; of the waxen figure meant for the king, and which they have pierced to the heart. CATHERINE."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE INVISIBLE BUCKLERS.

THE day after that on which Catherine had written this letter, the governor entered Coconnas's cell with an imposing cortege of two halberdiers and four black-gowned men.

Coconnas was invited to descend into the room where Laguesle and two judges waited to interrogate him, according to Catherine's instructions.

During the eight days he had passed in prison, Coconnas had reflected deeply; besides that, he and La Mole, seeing each other daily, had agreed on the conduct they were to pursue, which was to persist in an absolute denial, and they were persuaded that with a little address the affair would take a more favorable turn. Coconnas was ignorant that Henry was in the same prison with themselves, and the complaisance of his jailer told him that over his head there was extended protection, which he called "invisible bucklers."

Up to this time, the interrogations had been confined to the designs of the king of Navarre, his projects of flight, and the part the two friends had borne in these projects. Coconnas had constantly replied in a way more than vague, and much more than adroit, and he was ready still to reply in a similar manner, and had prepared beforehand all his little repartees, when he suddenly found the object of the interrogatory to be altered.

It was now directed to several visits made to Rene, and one or more waxen figures made at La Mole's instigation. Prepared as he was, Coconnas believed that the accusation had lost much of its intensity, since it was no longer in reference to having betrayed a king, but to having made a figure of a queen, and this queen not more than from eight to ten inches high at most. He therefore replied with much vivacity, that neither he nor his friend had played with a doll for many years; and he saw with much satisfaction that his replies more than once made the judges laugh. His interrogatory concluded, he went up to his chamber singing so merrily that La Mole, for whom he made all this noise, drew from it the brightest auguries.

La Mole was brought down from his tower, as Coconnas had been, and saw with equal astonishment the fresh turn which the investigation took. He was questioned as to his visits to Rene. He replied that Rene had showed him such a figure, ready-made. Then he was asked if this figure did not represent a man. He replied that it represented a woman. Then, if the purpose of the charm was not to cause the death of this man. He replied that the purpose of the charm was to cause himself to be loved by the woman.

These questions, put in a hundred different ways, were always replied to by La Mole in the same manner. The judges looked at each other with a kind of indecision, not knowing very well what to say or do, when a note brought to the attorney-general solved the difficulty. It was thus couched: "If the accused denies, put him to the torture.—C."

The attorney put the note in his pocket, smiled at La Mole, and politely dismissed him. La Mole returned to the dungeon almost as assured, if not as joyous, as Coconnas.

"I think all will now go well," he said.

An hour afterward, he heard footsteps, and saw a note which was slipped under his door, without seeing the hand that did it. He took it up with a trembling hand, and almost died with joy as he recognized the writing.

"Courage!" said the billet. "I am watching over you."

"Ah! if she is watching," cried La Mole, kissing the billet which had touched a hand so dear, "if she is watching, I am saved!"

It is necessary, in order that La Mole should comprehend the purport of the note, and rely, with Coconnas, on what the Piedmontese called his "invincible bucklers," that we should conduct the reader to that small house, to that small chamber, where so many tender recollections, so many bitter feelings, were agonizing the heart of a female, lying back on a divan covered with velvet cushions.

"To be a queen—powerful, young, rich, beautiful—and suffer what I suffer!" exclaimed she; "oh, it is horrible!"

Then, in her agitation, she rose, paced up and down, suddenly paused, pressed her burning forehead against the ice-cold marble, rose, pale and her face covered with tears, wrung her hands in agony, and fell back, fainting, into the nearest chair.

Suddenly the tapestry which separated the apartment in the Rue Cloche-Percée from the apartment in the Rue Tizon was lifted up, and the Duchesse de Nevers appeared.

"Ah!" exclaimed Marguerite, "is it you? With what impatience I have awaited you. Well, what news?"

"Bad news—bad news, my dear friend! Catherine herself is hurrying on the trial, and is at this moment at Vincennes."

"And Rene?"

"Is arrested."

"And our dear prisoners?"

"The jailer informs me that they see

each other daily. The day before yesterday they were searched, and La Mole broke your miniature to atoms rather than let them have it."

"Dear La Mole!"

"Annibal laughed in the teeth of the inquisitors."

"Worthy Annibal! And what more?"

"They were this morning interrogated as to the flight of the king, his projects of rebellion in Navarre; and they said not one word."

"Oh, I knew they would keep silence; but silence will kill them just as much as if they spake."

"Yes, but we must save them."

"You have thought over our plan, then?"

"I have occupied myself with it since yesterday."

"Well?"

"I have come to terms with Beaulieu. Ah, my dear queen, what a hard and greedy man! It will cost a man's life and three hundred thousand crowns."

"Only the life of a man and three hundred thousand crowns! Why, it is nothing!"

"Nothing? Why, it will cost us all our jewels at least."

"Oh, that's nothing! The king of Navarre will pay something, the Duke d'Alencon pay something, my brother Charles must pay something, or if not—"

"Oh, do not trouble yourself; I have the money, or at least three diamonds that will produce it, and the man."

"The man—what man?"

"The man who must be killed, to be sure. Have you already forgotten that there is a man to be killed?"

"And you have found the man you wanted?"

"Precisely so."

"At the same price?" asked Marguerite, with a smile.

"At that price I could have found ten," replied Henriette; "no, no, for five hundred crowns."

"Really!"

"Now listen; this is the plot. The chapel is the only place in the fortress where women not being prisoners are admitted. We shall hide behind the altar; under the cloth will be laid two daggers. The door of the sacristy will be previously opened. Coconnas will strike the jailer, who will fall down as if dead; we shall then appear, and each cast a cloak over the shoulders of our friend. We shall then fly with them by the small door of the sacristy, and, as we shall have the password, we shall get out without difficulty."

"And once out?"

"Two horses will be in waiting at the door: they will jump on them, leave France, and reach Lorraine, whence they will occasionally return incognito."

"Oh, you restore me to life," said Marguerite. "Thus, then, we shall save them."

"I feel almost confident."

"And soon?"

"In three or four days; Beaulieu is to let us know."

"But if you were recognized in the environs of Vincennes, all our plans might be marred."

"How could any one recognize me? I go as a nun, with a large hood over my face; and no one would ever recognize the end of my nose."

"We cannot take too many precautions."

"I know that well enough, Mordi! as my poor dear Annibal says."

"Have you any news of the king of Navarre?"

"Yes, he was never happier, it appears—laughs, sings, and eats, drinks, and sleeps well; all he asks is to be well guarded."

"He is right."

"Adieu, Marguerite! I am going to take the field again."

"Are you sure of Beaulieu?"

"I think so."

"Of the jailer?"

"He has promised."

"Horses?"

"The best in the Duke de Nevers' stables."

"Henriette, I adore you!" And Marguerite threw her arms around her friend's neck; after which the two women sepa-

rated, promising to see each other again next day and every day, at the same place and hour. They were the two charming and devoted creatures whom Coconnas, with so much reason, called the "invisible bucklers."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE TRIAL.

"WELL, my brave friend," said Coconnas to La Mole, when left together at the close of their examination, "everything seems going on as favorably as we could desire it, and we shall ere long be at liberty."

"No doubt," answered La Mole; "and then the complaisance with which our jailers treat us abundantly proves that our noble friends are at work for us."

"To be sure they are," rejoined Coconnas; "and how could a queen or a princess better employ their riches than in procuring our freedom? Now let us go over our lesson a little. We are to be conducted to the chapel, where we shall be left in charge of our turnkey; we each of us find a dagger concealed for our use in a spot described to us. Well, then I manage to inflict a severe-looking, but in reality innocent wound, on our guard, to make it appear we, being two, overpowered him. The next thing, we barricade the door of the chapel by piling up the benches against it, while our two princesses emerge from their hiding-places behind the altar, and Henriette opens the small side-door!"

"And then," exclaimed La Mole, in accents of delight, "we rush forth, and exchange our gloomy prison for the fine fresh air. A couple of vigorous horses are in waiting for us; a hasty embrace with our fair preservers, and away we go to Lorraine. True, I could have wished to be banished to Navarre, for that is her home; but as things are, we must be content at Nancy, which is but fifty leagues from Paris."

"But what ails you, my friend?"

"Nothing—merely an idea that came across me."

"I should think not a very agreeable one, by your becoming so pale."

"I was wondering within myself why we were taken to the chapel at all."

"Why," said Coconnas, "to pray, of course—what else?"

"But," answered La Mole, "it is only customary for those who have undergone the torture or are condemned to death to pass the night in the chapel."

"Truly," replied Coconnas, becoming pale in his turn, "this deserves our attention; let us speak to the worthy fellow I am to carve my name upon with my dagger.—Here, I say, turnkey!"

"Did you call?" said the man, who had been keeping watch at the top of the stairs.

"We want to know whether it is not arranged for us to escape from the chapel?"

"Hush!" said the turnkey, looking round him with terror.

"Don't be frightened—no one can hear you; speak out."

"Yes, you will be conducted to the chapel, according to the custom that all persons condemned to death shall pass the night previous to their execution in prayer."

Coconnas and La Mole exchanged looks of surprise and alarm.

"You expect, then, that we shall be condemned to death?"

"Why, you think so yourselves, don't you? else why take the trouble to make arrangements for your flight?"

"There is reason in what he says," said Coconnas.

"We are playing a critical game, it seems," replied La Mole.

"And do I risk nothing?" said the jailer. "Suppose, in the excitement of the moment, you were to wound me in the wrong place, strike your dagger an inch or two deeper than you intended?"

"Mordi!" exclaimed Coconnas, "I only wish we could change places, and I had nothing more to fear than you have. But hark! I fancy some one is approaching."

"Oh, pray, pray, gentlemen, get into your cells—make haste!"

"And when will our trial take place?"

"To-morrow at latest, but don't be un-

easy; the friends who are interested for you shall be duly informed."

"Then let us bid adieu to each other for the present, and to these detested walls forever!"

The friends exchanged an affectionate embrace, and each retired to his place of confinement—La Mole sighing, Coconnas humming an air. Nothing unusual occurred until seven o'clock in the evening. Night descended, dark and rainy, on the donjon of Vincennes; just such weather as would have favored an escape. Coconnas's supper was brought, and eaten with his ordinary appetite; and he had well-nigh composed himself to sleep, while listening to the loud murmurs of the wind, and the splashing rain as it drove heavily against the walls, when he was roused by a sound of persons passing to and fro from the chamber of La Mole.

In vain did Coconnas strain his listening powers—he could distinguish nothing. The time passed on—no person came near him. "Strange," murmured he, "that La Mole should receive so many visits, while I seem quite forgotten! perhaps La Mole felt himself suddenly taken ill, and called out for assistance. What can it mean?"

An hour and a half was thus consumed in vainly watching for some clearance to this mystery, and Coconnas was beginning to feel both angry and sleepy, when the sudden turning of the lock made him spring to his feet.

"All's right," said he, mentally; "they are coming, no doubt, to conduct us to the chapel, without any previous condemnation. Mordi! the night is most favorable—dark as a pit; I only hope the horses they give us will be able to find their way."

He was about to ask some jocular question of the turnkey, who had by that time entered, when he observed the man put his finger to his lips, and roll his great eyes in a most significant manner.

Coconnas then perceived a dim outline of persons following the jailer, and quickly distinguished two figures wearing helmets, on which the candle, smoking and flickering in the strong current of air rushing up the staircase, cast a reflection. "Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed he; "what is the meaning of all this?—where are we going to?"

The jailer replied only with a sigh, which resembled a groan.

"Follow the halberdiers, sir," said a voice, which at once made Coconnas aware that the soldiers were accompanied by an officer of some kind.

"And where is M. de la Mole?" inquired the Piedmontese; "what has become of him?"

"Follow the halberdiers!" repeated the same voice that had previously issued the same command.

Further remonstrance was unavailing; without another word, therefore, Coconnas began to descend the spiral staircase. At the first floor the guards stopped; the door was opened, and a number of persons arrayed as judges and seated in judicial order presented themselves, while in the background Coconnas discerned the dim outline of a man with naked arms and a look that made a cold dew start to his forehead.

Still concealing his alarm, he entered the chamber with an easy *degagée* air, his head thrown a little on one side, and his hand on his hip, after the most approved manner of court gallants. As Coconnas advanced, he perceived La Mole sitting on a bench near the judges and officials. The guards led Coconnas to the front of the tribunal: arrived there, he stopped, turned round, and smilingly nodded to La Mole; then remained in close attention to the proceedings of the court.

"What is your name?" inquired the president.

"Marc Annibal de Coconnas," replied the Piedmontese, with gentlemanly grace, "Count of Montpantier, Chenaux, and other places; but I presume you don't wish to know all that."

"Where were you born?"

"At Saint Colomban, near Suza."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven years and three months."

"Good!" answered the president.

"He seems to be pleased with my account of myself," murmured Coconnas.

"Now, then," continued the president, "what was your motive in quitting the service of the Duke d'Alencon?"

"To rejoin my friend, M. de la Mole, who, when I quitted M. d'Alencon, had also left him some days."

"And what were you doing when arrested, the day of the chase at Saint-Germains?"

"Why, hunting, of course!" replied Coconnas.

"The king was also present at that chase, and there he was first seized with violent illness."

"I know nothing about that; I was not near the king myself, and I did not even know he had been taken ill."

The judges regarded each other with an air of incredulity.

"Oh! you were ignorant of his majesty's illness, were you?"

"Yes, completely so, and I regret to hear of it; for though the king of France is not my king, I still pity him, and feel for him very much."

"Really?"

"On my honor I do. I don't say as much for his brother, the Duke d'Alencon, for there, I must confess—"

"We have nothing to do with the Duke d'Alencon; our business is with his majesty—"

"Whose very humble servant I have already told you I am," answered Coconnas.

"Then, being his servant, as you say, be pleased to tell us what you know relative to a certain wax figure."

"Oh! what, we are going over that story again, are we?"

"If you have no objection."

"Pardi! on the contrary, I prefer it—go on."

"How came this statue to be found in M. de la Mole's possession?"

"M. de la Mole's! No, no, you mean in Rene's possession."

"Then you acknowledge the existence of such an image?"

"I don't know whether it exists or not—I could tell you better if I saw it."

"Here it is. Is it the one you have previously seen?"

"It is."

"Write down," said the judge, "that the accused recognizes the statue as the one he has heretofore seen in the possession of M. de la Mole."

"No, no, no!" interposed Coconnas, "do not let us mistake one another; write that I say it is the same figure I saw at Rene's."

"Well, be it so—at Rene's, and on what day?"

"The only day La Mole and myself ever were at Rene's."

"You admit, then, having been there with M. de la Mole?"

"Why, I never denied it, did I?"

"Write down that the accused admits having gone to Rene's to work certain charms and conjurations—"

"Stop, if you please, M. le President, and moderate your enthusiasm a little—I said no such thing."

"You deny having gone to Rene's house for the sake of charms and magical purposes?"

"I do; the conjuration that took place was by chance, and wholly unpremeditated."——"But still it took place?"

"Certainly; I cannot deny that something resembling the working of a charm did occur."

"Write down that the accused admits having gone to Rene's for the sake of obtaining a charm against the king's life."

"The king's life!" exclaimed Coconnas; "'tis a base lie; no such charm was ever made or sought for."

"There, gentlemen!" said La Mole, "you hear!"

"Silence!" vociferated the president; then, turning toward the clerk, he said, "Against the king's life. Have you written it?"

"No, no!" cried Coconnas, "I said no such thing, and then the figure is not that of a man, but of a woman."

"What did I tell you, gentlemen?" inquired La Mole.

"M. de la Mole," said the president, "reply when you are questioned, but do not interrupt the interrogatory of others."

"You say that the figure is that of a female?" resumed the judge.

"Of course I do."

"Why, then, does it wear a royal crown and mantle?"

"Pardieu! for a very simple reason—because the figure was meant for—"

Here La Mole rose, and placed a finger on his lips.

"True!" said Coconnas, "I was beginning to relate matters with which these gentlemen have nothing at all to do."

"You persist, then, in your assertion that this waxen image was intended to represent a woman?"

"Certainly, I do persist in stating the truth."

"And you refuse to say who the woman was?"

"A female in my own country," said La Mole, "whom I loved, and by whom I was desirous of being beloved."

"You are not the person interrogated, M. de la Mole," exclaimed the president; "either be silent, or I shall be obliged to have you gagged."

"Gag a gentleman, and my friend, merely for speaking—can it be possible that I hear aright?—for shame! for shame!"

"Bring in Rene!" said the attorney-general.

"Yes, yes, by all means, fetch Rene," said Coconnas, "fetch him, pray; we shall soon see who is right then."

Rene entered, pale, shrunken, and so altered, that the two young men seemed scarce to recognize him. The wretched old man appeared more conscience-stricken and bowed down by the weight of the crime he was about to commit, than by those he had already perpetrated.

"Maître Rene!" said the judge, "do you know the two accused persons here present?"

"I do," answered Rene, in a voice which betrayed his emotion.

"As having seen them where?"

"In various places, but more especially at my own house."

"How frequently at your house?"

"Only once."

As Rene proceeded, the countenance of Coconnas grew brighter; La Mole, on the contrary, as though warned by some presentiment of evil, looked graver than before.

"And on what occasion did they pay you a visit?"

Rene seemed to hesitate a moment, then said: "To order me to make a small waxen figure."

"Maitre Rene," interrupted Coconnas, "permit me to tell you, you are making a little mistake."

"Silence, I command!" cried the president; then, turning toward Rene, he said, "and pray was this figure to represent a man or a woman?"

"A man!" answered Rene.

Coconnas sprung up as though he had received an electric shock. "A man, do you say?" asked he.

"A man!" responded Rene, but in so feeble a voice that the president could scarcely hear him.

"And why was this statue clad in a royal mantle, with a crown on its head?"

"Because," replied Rene, "it represented a king."

"Infamous liar!" cried Coconnas, perfectly infuriated.

"Hold your peace, Coconnas," interposed La Mole, "every man has a right to sell his soul his own way; let the wretched being say what he chooses."

"Ay, but he has no right to destroy the bodies of others while he barters his own soul!" answered Coconnas.

"And what is the signification of the needle found sticking in the heart of the image, with a small banner bearing the letter *m* at the end?"

"The needle is emblematical of the sword or dagger, and the letter *m* stands for *mort*."

Coconnas sprung forward as though to strangle Rene, but was held back by the guards.

"That will do!" said the officer; "the tribunal is in possession of all it desires to know. Let the prisoners be reconducted to the waiting-room."

"But," exclaimed Coconnas, "it is quite impossible to hear one's self accused of such crimes without protesting against them."

"Protest as much as you like, gentle-

men, no person hinders you.—Guards, take the prisoners away."

The officials seized upon La Mole and Coconnas, and led them away, each by a separate door. The attorney-general then signed to the man with bare arms, whom Coconnas had observed on entering, and said:

"Do not go away, my good fellow, there will be work for you ere the night is over."

"Which shall I begin with?" said the man, respectfully raising his cap.

"With that one!" answered the president, pointing to La Mole, whose shadow could just be discerned between his two guards; then, approaching Rene, who stood in trembling expectation of being ordered back to his place of confinement in the Chatelet: "You have well spoken, my friend; be under no alarm, both the king and the queen shall be made acquainted that it is to you they will be indebted for coming at the real truth of this affair."

But this promise, instead of inspiring Rene with fresh hope, seemed but to augment his alarm, and he replied only by a deep sigh, almost resembling the groan of one in pain.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE TORTURE OF THE BOOT.

It was only when again conducted to his chamber, and the door secured on him, that Coconnas, no longer sustained by the altercation with the judges, fell into a train of reflections.

"It seems to me," thought he, "matters are going against us. They really wish to cut off our heads. I think it is time to go to the chapel."

These words, pronounced in a low tone, were cut short by a cry so shrill, so piercing, that it seemed impossible it could proceed from a human being, for it penetrated through the thick wall, and vibrated against the iron bars.

Coconnas shuddered with terror, although he was so brave that his courage was nearly allied to that of wild beasts. He stood motionless, doubting whether what he had heard was not the wind, when he heard it again; and this time he was convinced not only that the voice was human, but that it was the voice of La Mole. At this voice, the Piedmontese forgot he was himself a prisoner confined by two doors, three gates, and a wall twelve feet thick; he rushed forward, crying, "They are murdering some one here!"

But he encountered the wall so violently that the shock threw him back on a stone bench.

"Oh, they have killed him!" repeated he; "it is abominable, and without arms."

He looked about on every side for a weapon.

At this moment the door opened, and the same voice that had been before so disagreeable to him, said:

"Come, sir, the court attends you."

"Good!" said Coconnas; "to hear my sentence, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"I breathe again—go on, sir." And he followed the officer, who marched in front, his black wand in his hand.

Spite of his expressed satisfaction, Coconnas glanced anxiously on either side. "Oh," murmured he, "I do not see my worthy jailer; I wish he was here."

On entering the chamber, Coconnas perceived the attorney-general, who had conducted the prosecution with most palpable animosity, for Catherine had charged him to carry on the affair earnestly. A curtain was drawn back, and exposed the recesses of this chamber: so terrible were these recesses, thus lighted up, that Coconnas felt his knees tremble, and he exclaimed, "Oh, mon Dieu!"

The sight before him was indeed alarming. The portion of the apartment which had been concealed during the examination by a curtain, now raised, seemed like the vestibule of hell. "Oh!" said Coconnas, "the chamber of torture is prepared, and only awaits the victim. What does this mean?"

"Kneel down, M. Annibal de Coconnas," thundered a voice; "kneel down, and hear your sentence."

And before he had time even to collect his thoughts, two strong hands laid hold of him, and forced him to his knees.

The voice continued : "Sentence of the court sitting at Vincennes on Marc Annibal de Coconnas, accused and convicted of the crime of high treason, of an attempt to poison, of sacrilege and magic against the person of the king, of a conspiracy against the state, and of having driven a prince of the blood into rebellion by his pernicious counsels."

At each fresh charge, Coconnas kept shaking his head very determinately.

The judge continued : "In consequence of which, the aforesaid Marc Annibal de Coconnas will be taken from prison to the Place St.-Jean-en-Grève, to be there decapitated, his property confiscated, his woods cut down, his châteaux destroyed ; and a post, with a copper plate bearing an inscription recording his crime and punishment, planted there."

"As for my head," said Coconnas, "that I know is in jeopardy ; but as for my woods and chateaux, I do not fear for them in the least, and I defy all your hatchets and pickaxes to harm them."

"Silence !" said the judge, and he continued :

"And, moreover, the aforesaid Coconnas—"

"What !" interrupted Coconnas, "will they do anything more after cutting my head off ?—that is very cruel !"

"No, monsieur," replied the judge, "*before.*"

He continued: "And the aforesaid Coconnas will undergo, before the execution of this sentence, the extraordinary question, consisting of ten wedges."

Coconnas sprang to his feet, and fixing his eyes with a withering expression on his judges, "For what ?" cried he.

This torture was, in reality, ruin to Coconnas's hopes. He would not be taken to the chapel until after the torture, and the torture often occasioned death ; for it was held to be a proof of cowardice to confess, and the torture was therefore the more severe in proportion to the patient's obstinacy.

The judge made no reply, but continued : "In order to compel the aforesaid Coconnas to avow who were his accomplices."

"Mordi !" cried Coconnas, "this is infamous—this is cowardice !"

The judge, accustomed to the indignant protestations of the victims, made a sign. Coconnas, seized by the legs and arms, was overpowered and bound to the rack, before he could even see who were the authors of this violence.

"Wretches!" shouted Coconnas, straining the cords that bound him so violently, that his tormentors retreated in alarm. "Cowards ! do your worst ; I defy you to extract one word from me. It is not the torture that can make one of my race speak."

"Greffier, prepare to write," said the judge.

"Yes, prepare to write," cried Coconnas ; "and if you write all I tell you, you scoundrel, you will have something to do."

"Will you confess ?" asked the judge.

"Never !"

"You had better reflect while it is yet time. Executioner, make ready."

At these words, a man holding a cord in his hand advanced toward him. It was Maitre Caboche. Caboche, without moving a muscle of his face, or affecting to recognize Coconnas, placed two planks between his legs, then two more outside, and bound them together with a cord.

This formed what was called the "boot."

In the "ordinary" question, six wedges were used, which crushed the flesh : in the "extraordinary" question ten were employed, which not only crushed the flesh, but broke the bones also.

Maitre Caboche introduced the wedge between the planks, and then, with his mallet in his hand, looked at the judge.

"Will you confess ?" asked the latter.

"Never!" returned Coconnas, although he felt a cold damp all over his brow.

"Proceed," said the judge.

Caboche raised his heavy mallet, and struck a tremendous blow on the wedge. Coconnas did not utter the slightest sound at this first wedge, which usually extorted a groan from the most resolute. On the contrary, his countenance expressed the greatest wonder, and he gazed in astonishment at Caboche, who, his arm raised, stood ready to repeat the blow.

"What was your intention in concealing yourself in the forest?" demanded the judge.

"To enjoy the fresh air."

"Proceed," said the judge.

Caboche struck again. Coconnas did not stir, but kept his eyes fixed on the executioner with the same expression of surprise. The judge frowned.

"He is indeed determined!" muttered he; "has the wedge entered, maitre?"

Caboche stooped, as if to examine it, and whispered Coconnas, "Cry out! cry out!" Then rising, "Up to the head, sir," said he to the judge.

"Second wedge!" was the reply.

The words of Caboche explained all to Coconnas; the worthy executioner was rendering him the greatest service in his power: he was sparing him not only pain, but, moreover, the shame of a confession, by driving, in place of oak wedges, wedges of leather, with the top only of wood; and further, he thus left him all his strength to mount the scaffold manfully.

"Oh, excellent Caboche!" muttered Coconnas, "fear nothing; I will cry out loud enough."

Caboche had introduced a second wedge, larger than the first, and, at a sign from the judge, struck as if he were going to demolish the donjon of Vincennes at a blow.

"Ah! ah!—hou! hou!" roared Coconnas, "you are breaking my bones!"

"Ah," said the judge, "the second seems to take effect. What were you doing in the forest?"

"I have already told you."

"Proceed."

"Confess," whispered Caboche.

"What?"

"Anything—only confess."

And he dealt another blow on the wedge.

"Oh, oh!" cried Coconnas, "you wish to know by whose order I was in the forest?"

"Yes."

"By the order of M. d'Alencon."

"Write that," said the judge.

"If I laid a snare for the king of Navarre," continued Coconnas, "I only obeyed my master's orders."

"Ah, you denounced me, tallow-face!" thought Coconnas; "I will be even with you."

And he related all the visits of Francois to the king of Navarre, the interviews between De Mouy and D'Alencon, and the history of the red mantle. He gave precise, terrible, incontestable evidence against D'Alencon, making it seem all the while as though his statements were only extorted from him by the pain, he yelled, screamed, and foamed so naturally; and the judge at last became terrified himself at having to record details that so fearfully compromised a prince of the blood.

"Ah," said Caboche, "this gentleman gives the greffier enough to do. What would he have said, if the wedges had been of wood?"

The judge retired, excusing Coconnas the other wedges in consequence of his confession, and Caboche was left alone with Coconnas.

"Well," said he, "how do you find yourself, sir?"

"Ah, excellent Caboche, I will never forget what you have done for me!"

"You are right; for if they knew what I have done for you, I should soon take your place, and they would not amuse me with leathern wedges."

"But how came you to think—?"

"I will tell you," said Caboche, twisting, for the sake of appearances, bandages of bloody linen about Coconnas's legs; "I knew you were arrested, that Queen Catherine wished to kill you, and I guessed you would be put to the question, and I took my measures accordingly."

"At the risk of what might happen to yourself?"

"Sir," replied Caboche, "you are the only gentleman who has ever given me his hand, and I wished to prove to you that, executioner as I am, I have a heart: you shall see how I will perform my office to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"What office?"

Caboche started.

"Have you forgotten the sentence?"

"Ah, true, I had forgotten all about that."

He had not forgotten it, but he was thinking of the chapel, the knife concealed beneath the napkin, of Henriette and the queen, of the door of the sacristy, the two horses that awaited them; of liberty, of the fresh air, and happiness and security beyond the bounds of France.

"Now," said Caboche, "I must get you from the rack to the litter. Do not forget both your legs are broken, and that the least movement pains you."

"Ah! oh!" cried Coconnas, as the two assistants advanced.

"Take courage," said Caboche; "if you cry so now, what will you do presently?"

"Maitre Caboche," replied Coconnas, "I pray you lift me yourself, as I do not wish your two estimable acolytes to touch me."

"Place the litter near the rack," said Caboche.

The two assistants obeyed.

Caboche then raised Coconnas in his arms as if he had been an infant, and placed him on the litter.

The jailer then appeared with a lantern.

"To the chapel," said he.

The bearers and Coconnas started, after Coconnas had again given his hand to Caboche.

The former grasp had been too useful to him not to induce him to repeat it.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE CHAPEL.

THE mournful cortege crossed, in perfect silence, the two drawbridges of the fortress and the courtyard which leads to the chapel, through the windows of which a pale light colored the figures of the men in red robes.

Coconnas eagerly breathed the night air, although it was heavy with rain. He looked at the darkness, and rejoiced to see that everything conspired to favor the flight of himself and his companion. On entering the chapel he saw in the choir, and at three paces from the altar, a mass of something wrapped in a large white mantle. It was La Mole.

"Since we are once more reunited," said Coconnas, in a voice of affected languor, "carry me to my friend."

La Mole was gloomy and pale; his head reclined against the marble wall, and his black hair, bathed with profuse perspiration, which gave to his countenance the paleness of ivory, seemed to have preserved the form it had assumed after having been stiffened on his head with the pain.

On a signal from the turnkey, the two valets went to seek the priest whom Coconnas had asked for.

This was the signal agreed upon.

Coconnas followed them with his eyes with anxiety; but his was not the only ardent look fixed on them. Scarcely had they disappeared than two women rushed from behind the altar, and hastened rapidly toward the choir.

Marguerite hurried toward La Mole and seized him in her arms. La Mole uttered a piercing shriek—one of those cries which Coconnas had heard in his dungeon.

"Mon Dieu! what ails thee, dear La Mole?" inquired Marguerite. "Oh, Heaven! you are all blood!"

Coconnas, who had also rushed toward the altar, taken up the dagger, and had his arm round Henriette's waist, turned suddenly.

"Get up," said Marguerite; "get up, I entreat you! You see the moment has arrived."

A terrible smile of grief passed over La Mole's pale lips, which seemed as though they would never smile again.

"Beloved queen!" said the young man, "you have calculated without Catherine, and consequently without a crime. I have been put to the torture; my bones are broken, all my body is one wound, and the effort I make at this moment to press my lips upon your forehead causes me agony worse than death."

And as he spoke, with great exertion, and ghastly pale, La Mole pressed his lips on the queen's brow.

"Torture!" cried Coconnas; "and so did I undergo it. But the executioner, then, did not do for you what he did for me?" And Coconnas told all.

"Ah!" replied La Mole, "that is easily explained. You gave him your hand on the day of our visit; I forgot that all men were brothers, and was disdainful. God punishes me for my pride. God be praised!"

La Mole clasped his hands. Coconnas and the two ladies exchanged a look of indescribable horror.

"Come, come," said the jailer, who had been to the door to listen, and had returned; "come along! Do not lose any time, my dear M. de Coconnas. Give me my blow with the dagger, and manage it like a worthy kind gentleman, for they will soon be here."

Marguerite was kneeling beside La Mole, like one of the reclining figures on a monument.

"Come, my dear friend," said Coconnas; "courage! I am strong, and will carry you. I can place you on your horse, or hold you on my own, if you could keep yourself erect in the saddle. Come, let us go—let us go! You understand what the good fellow says: our lives are at stake."

La Mole made a superhuman, a sublime effort. "True," he said, "*your* life is at stake," and he tried to rise.

Annibal placed his arms under him and raised him up. La Mole, during this time, had only uttered a low moaning; but at the moment when Coconnas let him go, to speak to the turnkey, and when the sufferer was no longer supported but by the arms of two women, his legs bent under him, and in spite of Marguerite's efforts, the tears gushing from her, he fell like a mass, and the piercing shriek he could no longer repress made the chapel echo through all its gloomy vaults.

"You see," said La Mole, in an agony of distress: "you see, my beloved, so leave me—leave me with one last adieu. I have not revealed one word, Marguerite. Your secret is enveloped in my love, and will die with me. Adieu, dearest, adieu!"

Marguerite, almost lifeless herself, threw her arms round that dear and beautiful head, and imprinted on his brow a kiss that was almost holy.

"You, Annibal," said La Mole; "you who have been spared these agonies, who are young and may escape, fly, fly! my dearest friend, and give me the consolation, when dying, to know that you are in safety."

"The hour is passing," exclaimed the jailer. "Come, gentlemen, make haste!"

Henriette endeavored to lead Annibal gently away; while Marguerite was on her knees before La Mole, her hair disheveled, and eyes overflowing with tears.

"Fly, Annibal!" repeated La Mole: "fly, and do not afford our enemies the joyful spectacle of the death of two innocent men."

Coconnas quietly disengaged himself from Henriette, who was leading him to the door, and with a gesture so solemn that it was majestic, said:

"Madame, first give the five hundred crowns we have promised to this man."

"Here they are," said Henriette.

Then, turning toward La Mole and shaking his head sorrowfully, he said:

"As for you, La Mole, you have done me an injury by thinking for one moment that I would quit you. Have I not sworn to live and die with you? But you are so great a sufferer, that I forgive you."

And he seated himself with a resolute air near his friend, toward whom he leaned his head, and whose forehead he touched with his lips.

Then he drew gently, gently as a mother would a child, the head of his dear friend toward him, until it glided from the wall, and reposed itself calmly on his breast.

Marguerite was gloomy: she had picked up the poniard which Coconnas had let fall.

"Oh, my beloved one!" cried La Mole, extending his hands as he comprehended her purpose, "do not forget that I die in order to destroy the slightest suspicion of our love."

"What, then, can I do for you," exclaimed Marguerite, in despair, "if I must not die with you?"

"You may," replied La Mole; "you may render my death sweet, and so that I may in a manner meet it with a smile."

Marguerite clasped her hands, and looked inquiringly at him.

"Do you remember the evening, Marguerite, when in exchange for the life I offered you then, and to-day lay down for you, you made me a sacred promise?"

Marguerite started.

"Ah, you do remember!" said La Mole, "for you shudder."

"Yes, yes, I remember," said Marguerite; "and on my soul, Hyacinthe, I will keep that promise."

Marguerite extended her hand toward the altar, as if a second time to call on God to witness her oath.

La Mole's face lighted up as if the vaulted roof of the chapel had opened.

"They are coming!" exclaimed the jailer.

Marguerite uttered a cry, and hastened toward La Mole, but for fear of increasing his agony, she paused all trembling before him. Henriette pressed her lips on Coconnas's brow, and said to him:

"Dearest Annibal, I understand you, and I am proud of you. I know the heroism that makes you die, and I love you for that heroism. Before God, I will always love you more than anything living; and what Marguerite has sworn to do for La Mole (although I know not what it is) I will also do for you."

And she held out her hand to Marguerite.

"Well said: now Heaven be with you!" replied Coconnas.

"Before you leave me, dearest," said La Mole, "one last favor; give me some last souvenir, that I may kiss it as I mount the scaffold."

"Ah, yes," cried Marguerite, "here, take this!"—and she untied from her neck a small reliquary of gold, fastened to a chain of the same metal.

"Here," she said, "is a holy relic which I have worn from my childhood: my mother put it round my neck when I was very little and she still loved me. It was given by our uncle, Pope Clement, and has never quitted me. Take it!"

La Mole took it, and kissed it eagerly.

"They are opening the door," said the jailer. "Fly, ladies, fly!"

The two women hastened behind the altar, and disappeared at the moment the priest entered.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PLACE SAINT-JEAN-EN-GREVE.

It was seven o'clock in the morning, and the crowd was waiting, dense and riotous, in the squares, the streets, and the quays.

At six o'clock in the morning a tumbril, the same in which the two friends after their duel had been conveyed half dead to the Louvre, had quitted Vincennes, crossed the Rue Saint Antoine slowly, and on its route, the spectators, so huddled together that they crushed one another, seemed like statues, with their eyes fixed and their mouths open in wonderment.

There was this day a heart-rending spectacle offered by the queen-mother to all the people of Paris.

In the tumbril we have mentioned as making its slow way from Vincennes were lying on some straw two young men, bareheaded and entirely clothed in black, leaning against each other. Coconnas supported on his knees La Mole, whose head hung over the sides of the tumbril, and whose eyes wandered vaguely around him.

The crowd, eager to stare with greedy gaze, even to the bottom of the vehicle, pressed, drove, heaved, lifted itself upon stones, clung to angles of the walls, and appeared satisfied when it contrived to gain a look at the two bodies which were going from suffering to destruction.

It was rumored that La Mole would die without having confessed one of the charges imputed to him; while, on the contrary, Coconnas, it was asserted, could not endure the torture, and had disclosed everything.

So there were cries on all sides:

"Look at the red-haired one! It was he who confessed! It was he who owned everything! He is the coward who caused the death of the other, who is a brave fellow, and would not confess anything!"

The two young men perfectly understood this: the one the praises, and the other the reproaches, which accompanied

their funeral march; and while La Mole pressed the hands of his friend, a sublime expression of disdain overspread the features of the Piedmontese, who from the foul tumbril gazed on the stupid mob as if he were looking down from a triumphal car.

Misfortune had done its heavenly work; had ennobled the countenance of Coconnas as death was about to render divine his soul.

"Are we nearly there?" asked La Mole; "for I can endure this no longer, my dear friend, and I feel as if I should faint."

"Rouse thee — rouse thee, La Mole! We are passing by the Rue Tizon and the Rue Cloche-Percée. Look, look!"

"Oh, raise me—raise me, that I may once again behold that blissful abode!"

Coconnas touched the executioner on the shoulder, as he sat on the tumbril and drove the horse.

"Maître," he said, "do us the kindness to pause a moment in front of the Rue Tizon."

Caboche bowed his head in token of assent, and stopped.

La Mole raised himself with a vast effort, aided by Coconnas, and gazed, with tearful eyes, at the small house, now closed and silent as the tomb: a groan burst from his overcharged breast, and he said, in a low voice:

"Adieu, adieu—youth, love, life!"

And his head fell on his breast.

"Courage," said Coconnas; "we may, perchance, find all this above!"

"Do you think so?" murmured La Mole.

"I think so, because the priest told me so, and more especially because I hope so. But do not faint, my dear friend, or these wretches will laugh at us."

Caboche heard these last words, and whipping his horse with one hand, he extended the other—unseen by any one—to Coconnas. It contained a small sponge saturated with a powerful stimulant, which after having smelled and rubbed over his brow, La Mole felt himself revived and reanimated, and he kissed the reliquary suspended from his neck.

When they reached the quay they saw the scaffold, which was elevated considerably above the ground. "My friend," said La Mole, "I would fain die first."

Coconnas again touched the headsman's shoulder.

"Maitre," said Coconnas, "my friend has suffered more than I have, and he says he should suffer all the more to see me die first; and if I were to die before him, he would have no one to support him on the scaffold."

"Good, good!" said Caboche, wiping away a tear with the back of his hand; "be easy, it shall be as you desire."

"And with one blow, eh?" said the Piedmontese, in a low tone.

"Yes, with one blow!"

"'Tis well!"

The tumbril stopped. They had arrived. Coconnas put on his hat.

A murmur like that of the waves of the sea reached the ears of La Mole. He tried to rise, but his strength failed him, and Caboche and Coconnas were compelled to support him under his arms.

The place was paved with heads, and the steps of the Hotel de Ville seemed an amphitheater peopled with spectators; each window was filled with animated countenances.

When they saw the handsome young man who could no longer support himself on his legs, bruised and broken, make an effort to reach the scaffold, a vast sound was heard, like a cry of universal desolation; the men groaned, and the women uttered plaintive sighs.

"He was one of the grandest dons at the court," said one.

"How handsome he is! How pale he looks!" said the women. "He is the one who would not confess!"

"My dearest friend," said La Mole, "I cannot support myself. Carry me!"

"Stay a moment," replied Cocannas.

He made a sign to the executioner, who moved aside; then, stooping, he lifted La Mole in his arms, as if he had been an infant, and went up the steps to the scaffold with unfaltering foot, bore his burden firmly on to the platform, and put him down amid the shoutings and applause of the vast multitude.

Coconnas returned the greeting by raising his hat from his head, and then threw it down on the scaffold beside him.

"Look round," said La Mole; "do you see *them* anywhere?"

Coconnas glanced deliberately around him, and when his eyes reached a certain spot, paused. Then, without removing his look, he touched his friend on the shoulder, saying:

"Look, look, at the window of that little tower!"

With his other hand he pointed out to La Mole the small building which still exists at the corner of the Rue de la Vannerie and the Rue Monton—a remnant of past ages. Two females, clothed in black, were leaning on each other, somewhat retired from the window.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "I had but one fear, and that was to die without again seeing her. I have beheld her again, and now I can die."

And with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the small window, he lifted the reliquary to his lips, and covered it with kisses.

Coconnas saluted the two women with as much grace as if he were in a drawing-room, and they replied to the two devoted men by shaking their handkerchiefs bathed in tears.

Caboche then touched Coconnas on his shoulder, and looking at him very significantly, the Piedmontese replied:

"Yes, yes."

Then, turning to La Mole, he said to him:

"One last embrace, dear friend, and die like a man! That, beloved La Mole, will be no hardship for you, who are so brave."

"Ah," replied La Mole, "there will be no merit in me to die well, suffering the torments I do."

The priest approached, and extended the crucifix to La Mole, who smiled, and pointed to the reliquary he held in his hand.

"No matter," replied the priest, "still pray for strength from Him who suffered what you are about to suffer."

La Mole kissed the feet of the crucifix.

"I am ready," said La Mole.

"Can you hold your head upright?" asked Caboche, coming with his drawn sword behind La Mole, who was now on his knees.

"I hope so," was the reply.

"Then all will go well."

"But you," said La Mole, "will not forget what I requested of you; this reliquary will open the doors for you."

"Make yourself quite easy; and now try and hold your head perfectly straight."

La Mole held his neck erect, and looking toward the little tower, said:

"Adieu, Marguerite! bless—"

He could not finish; with one stroke of his keen and flashing sword, Caboche severed from the body the head of La Mole, which rolled to Coconnas's feet.

The body fell gently back, as if going to rest.

"Thanks, good friend, thanks," said Coconnas, extending his hand for the third time to the executioner.

One cry arose from the lips of a thousand human beings; and among them, Coconnas fancied he heard a shriek more piercing than all the rest.

"My son," said the priest to Coconnas, "have you nothing you would confess to God?"

"Ma foi! no, father," replied the Piedmontese, "all I had to say, I said yesterday to you."

Then, turning to Caboche, he said:

"Now, then, headsman, my last friend, one more service!"

Before he knelt, he turned on the multitude a look so calm, so full of resignation, that a murmur of admiration came to soothe his ear and flatter his pride. Then, taking in his hands the head of his dear friend, and impressing a last kiss on the purple lips, he gave one more look toward the little tower, and kneeling down, still holding the beloved head in his hands, he cried: "Now!"

He had scarcely uttered the word than Caboche, with a sweep of his arm, had cut his head from his body.

"It is time it was all over," said the worthy creature, trembling all over, "poor, poor fellow!"

He took with some difficulty from the clenched fingers of La Mole the reliquary of gold, and threw his cloak over the sad

remains, which the tumbril had yet to convey to his sinister abode.

The spectacle was over: the crowd dispersed.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE HEADSMAN'S TOWER.

NIGHT spread her mantle over the city, still shuddering under the recollection of this spectacle, the details of which passed from mouth to mouth and made sorrowful each family repast.

In contrast to the city, which was silent and mournful, the Louvre was joyous, noisy, and illuminated. There was a grand fete at the palace—a fete commanded by Charles IX.; a fete, which he had ordered for that evening at the same time he had ordered the execution for the morning.

The queen of Navarre had received on the previous evening the king's orders to be present, and in the hope that La Mole and Coconnas would escape in the night, in consequence of all measures being taken for their safety, she had promised her brother to comply with his desire.

But when she had lost all hope, after the terrible scene in the chapel—after she had, from a last impulse of that deep love which was the most decided and enduring of her life, been present at the execution, she had firmly resolved that neither prayers nor threats should compel her to go to a boisterous festival at the Louvre the same day on which she had witnessed so terrible a scene at the Greve.

The king had on this day exhibited another proof of that power of will which no one, perhaps, ever displayed more energetically than Charles IX.

In bed for a fortnight, weak as a dying man, ghastly as a corpse, he yet arose at five o'clock, and was attired in his gayest habiliments, although during his toilet he had fainted three times.

About eight o'clock he inquired after his sister, if any one had seen her, and if they knew where she was. No one could answer satisfactorily, for the queen had gone to her apartments about eleven o'clock, and refused admittance to everybody.

But there was no refusal for Charles. Leaning on the arm of M. de Nancey, he proceeded to the queen of Navarre's apartments and entered suddenly by the secret door.

Although he expected a melancholy sight, and had prepared for it, that which he beheld was even more distressing than he had anticipated.

Marguerite, half dead, was lying on a sofa, her head buried in the cushions, neither weeping nor praying; ever since her return she had been groaning in bitterest anguish.

At the other corner of the chamber, Henriette de Nevers, that daring bold woman, lay stretched on the carpet, without consciousness.

Charles desired Nancey to await him in the corridor, and entered, pale and trembling.

Neither of the women saw him: Gillonne, alone, who was at the moment endeavoring to revive Henriette, rose on her knee and looked terrified at the king, who made a sign with his hand, whereupon she rose, curtseyed reverentially, and retired.

Charles then approached Marguerite, looked at her for a moment in silence, and then, in a tone of which his harsh voice might have been thought incapable, said:

"Margot, my sister!"

The queen started, and turned round.

"Your majesty!" she said.

"Come, come, sister dear, rouse yourself."

Marguerite raised her eyes to heaven.

"Yes," said Charles; "I know all—but listen to me."

The queen made a sign that she listened.

"You promised me to come to the ball," said Charles.

"I?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Yes: and, after your promise, you are expected; and therefore, if you do not come, everybody will be surprised at not seeing you."

"Excuse me, brother," replied Marguerite; "you see how very ill I am."

"Exert yourself."

Marguerite endeavored for a moment

to summon courage, and then suddenly giving way again, sank on her sofa.

"No, no, I cannot go," she said.

Charles took her hand, seated himself beside her on the sofa and said:

"You have just lost a dear friend, Margot, I know full well. But look at me—have not I lost all my friends, and, moreover, my mother? You have time to bewail as you now do; but I, at the moment of my severest griefs, am always forced to smile—you suffer, but look at me! I am dying. Well, then, Margot, rouse thee; courage, girl! I ask thee, sister, for our name's honor. 'Tis an agony that we bear for the sake of our house: let us bear it, then, let us bear it, my beloved sister, courageously and resignedly."

"Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Yes," said Charles, following up the train of his reflections, "yes, the sacrifice is severe, my dear sister: but every one has his trials — some, of their honor; others, of their life. Do you suppose that, at twenty-five, and the most splendid throne in the world, I do not regret dying? Well, then, look at me! My eyes, my complexion, my lips are those of a dying man; yet my smile—would not my smile make all the world believe that I still hope? Yet in a week, a fortnight, a month at most, you will weep for me, my sister dear, as you do for him who died to-day."

"Dearest brother!" cried Marguerite, throwing her arms round Charles's neck.

"Come, dress yourself, dear Marguerite," said the king; "hide your paleness, and appear at the ball. I have desired that they should bring you some new jewels and ornaments worthy of your beauty."

"Oh, what are jewels and ornaments to me now!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Life is long, Marguerite!" said Charles with a smile, "at least, for you."

"No! no!"——"Sister, recollect one thing: it is sometimes by stifling, or rather dissimulating our suffering, that we show most honor to the dead."

"Well, sire," said Marguerite, shuddering, "I will attend the ball."

A tear, rapidly dried upon his parched eyelid, moistened Charles's eye for a moment. He kissed his sister's brow, paused a moment before Henriette, who had not seen or heard him, and then retired, saying, as he did so:

"Poor girl!"

"Get everything ready to dress me, Gillonne," said Marguerite.

The lady-in-waiting looked at her mistress in astonishment.

"Yes," said Marguerite, in a tone whose bitterness is indescribable, "yes, I shall dress: I am going to the ball—they expect me. Make haste, then, the day will then be complete: the fete at the Greve in the morning—the fete at the Louvre in the evening."

"And the duchesse?" asked Gillonne.

"Ah, she—she is quite happy! She may remain here—she may weep—suffer at her ease. She is not a king's daughter, a king's wife, a king's sister: she is not a queen. Help me to dress, Gillonne."

The young lady obeyed. The new ornaments sent by the king were splendid, and the dresses gorgeous. Marguerite had never looked so magnificently beautiful.

She looked at herself in a glass, and said: "My brother is right—a human being is a miserable creature."

Gillonne entered at this moment.

"Madame," she said, "here is a man asking after you."——"Who is he?"

"I do not know, but he is very horrid-looking; his very appearance made me tremble."

"Go and ask his name," said Marguerite, turning very pale.

Gillonne went out, and returning after a few minutes, said:

"He would not tell his name, madame, but begged me to give you this."

And Gillonne handed to Marguerite the reliquary which she had given to La Mole the night previous.

"Oh, bring him hither—bring him hither!" said the queen, eagerly, and becoming even more pale and her features more rigid.

A heavy step was heard upon the floor, and then a man appeared on the threshhold.

"You are—?" said the queen.

"He whom you saw one day near Montfaucon, madame, and who conveyed in his tumbril two wounded gentlemen to the Louvre."

"Yes, yes, I recognize you—you are Maitre Caboche."

"Executioner of the provostry of Paris, madame."

These were the only words which Henriette had heard of all those that had been spoken around her for the last hour. She then raised her pale face from her two hands, and looked at the headsman with her piercing eyes, which seemed to dart flames.

"And you come—" said Marguerite, tremulously.

"To remind you of the promise made to the youngest of the two gentlemen, him who charged me to return this reliquary to you. Do you recollect, madame?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the queen, "and never shall more noble shade have nobler satisfaction—but where is *it?*"

"It is at my abode, with the body."

"Why did you not bring it?"

"I might have been stopped at the wicket of the Louvre, and compelled to open my cloak; what would have been said, if a head had been discovered underneath?"

"True, true; keep it at your house, and I will come for it to-morrow."

"To-morrow, madame — to-morrow?" said Maitre Caboche, "it may be too late!"

"And wherefore?"

"Because the queen-mother desired me to keep for her magic experiments the heads of the first two criminals I should execute."

"Oh, profanation! the heads of our beloved!—Henriette," exclaimed Marguerite, running toward her friend, whom she found standing up as if a spring had placed her on her feet, "Henriette, my darling friend, do you hear what this man says?"

"Yes, and what are we to do?"

"We must accompany him;" and Marguerite threw a velvet cloak over her shoulders. "Come, come," she said, "we shall see them once more."

Marguerite took Henriette by the arm, and, going down the secret staircase, made a sign to Caboche to follow. At the door was her litter, and at the wicket they found Caboche's servant with a lantern.

Marguerite's bearers were trustworthy men, deaf and dumb, and worthier of confidence than beasts of burden.

They entered the litter, and were conveyed onward, until, suddenly stopping, the headsman opened the door.

Marguerite alighted, and aided the Duchesse de Nevers.

In their excessive grief, which thus tried them both, it was the nervous temperament that now gained the ascendant over the more powerfully organized frame.

"You may enter, ladies," said Caboche; "everybody is asleep in the tower."

At the same moment the light in the two windows was extinguished, and the ladies, clinging to each other, passed under the Gothic door, and went along in darkness over a rugged and slippery pavement.

Caboche, with a torch in his hand, led them into a chamber, low, and blackened with smoke.

In a conspicuous place was nailed to the wall a parchment sealed with the king's seal: it was the headsman's brevet.

In a corner was a large sword, with a long handle: it was the flaming sword of justice.

Here and there were seen several large images, representing saints under different kinds of martyrdom.

Having arrived here, Caboche made a low bow.

"Your majesty will pardon me," he said, "if I have dared to penetrate to the Louvre and conduct you hither; but it was the last and earnest wish of the gentleman; so—"

"You have done well, maitre," said Marguerite, "and this will recompense your zealous service."

Caboche eyed sorrowfully the purse, well filled with gold, which Marguerite placed on the table.

"Gold! gold! always gold!" he muttered. "Alas, madame, why cannot I redeem at the price of gold the blood I have been compelled to shed to-day!"

"Maitre," replied Marguerite, with painful hesitation, "I do not see—"

Caboche took the flambeau, opened an outer door, which, opening on to the staircase, led by a few steps into a cellar. At the same moment a current of air passed, which drove several sparks out of the torch, and brought up with it the nauseous smell of damp and blood.

Henriette, white as a marble statue, leaned on the arm of her friend, who moved with a more assured step; but at the first stair she staggered.

"I shall never be able—" she exclaimed.

"When one loves well, Henriette," replied the queen, "we love even beyond death itself."

It was a horrid and touching sight to see those two women, resplendent in youth, beauty, and attire, bending under this sordid and chalky vault, the weaker leaning on the stronger, and the stronger clinging to the headsman's arm.

They reached the lowest step.

On the floor of this cellar lay two human forms, covered with a large cloth of black serge.

Caboche raised a corner of this mort-cloth, and lowering his torch, said:

"Look, your majesty!"

In their black attire, the two young men lay side by side, in the fearful symmetry of death. Their heads, placed close on their bodies, seemed only divided from them by a red circle round the neck. Death had not separated their hands, for either by accident, or the pious attention of the headsman, the right hand of La Mole reposed in the left hand of Coconnas.

There was a look of love beneath the eyelids of La Mole; there was a smile of disdain under those of Coconnas.

Marguerite knelt down beside her lover, and, with her hands glittering with jewels, gently raised the head of him she had loved so well.

The Duchesse de Nevers, leaning against the wall, could not take her eyes off that pale face she had so often gazed upon with joy and love.

"La Mole! dearest La Mole!" murmured Marguerite.

"Annibal! Annibal!" cried the duchess. "So handsome, so proud, so brave, why dost thou not answer me?" and a torrent of tears gushed from her eyes.

Marguerite then put into a bag, embroidered with pearls and perfumed with the finest essences, the head of La Mole, which looked still more striking when in contact with the velvet and gold, and whose beauty a peculiar preparation, used at the period in royal embalmings, could not fail to preserve.

Henriette folded the head of Coconnas in the skirt of her mantle. And both, bending beneath their poignant sorrow, ascended the stairs, after one last lingering look at the loved remains they left to the mercy of an executioner, in this gloomy den of common criminals.

"Fear nothing, madame," said Caboche, who comprehended the look; "the gentlemen shall be buried in holy ground: this I swear to you."

"And have masses said for their souls, which this will pay for," said Henriette, taking from her neck a magnificent necklace of rubies, which she gave to the headsman.

They returned to the Louvre, and the queen, going to her own apartments, deposited the melancholy relic in the cabinet of her bedchamber, destined from that moment to become an oratory; then, leaving Henriette in her room, the queen, paler and lovelier than ever, about ten o'clock entered the splendid ball-room—the scene in which we commenced the first chapter of this our history, two years and a half previously.

All eyes were turned toward her, and she supported the universal gaze with a proud and almost joyous look, for she had religiously accomplished the dying wish of the beloved of her heart.

Charles, when he saw her, passed through the gilded throng, and said aloud:

"Thanks, my dear sister!" and then, in a lower tone: "Mind! you have a spot of blood upon your arm."

"What consequence is that, sire, if I have but a smile upon my lips?"

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SWEAT OF BLOOD.

Some days after the terrible scene we have related, that is, on the 30th of May, 1574, the court was at Vincennes, when suddenly a great noise was heard in the antechamber of the king, who had been ill in the midst of a grand ball he had given the very day of the young men's execution, and by advice of his physicians had come to Vincennes for change of air.

It was eight o'clock in the morning; a small group of courtiers was assembled in the antechamber, when the nurse appeared at the door of the royal apartment, crying:

"Help! help! the king is dying!"

"The king is worse, then?" said De Nancey, whom, as we have seen, Charles had attached to his own person.

"Oh, summon the doctors! summon the doctors!" cried the nurse.

Mazille and Ambroise Pare attended the king by turns, and Pare, having seen Charles fall asleep, had profited by the opportunity to retire for a few moments.

Meantime, Charles had broken into a profuse perspiration, and as he suffered from a relaxation of the capillary vessels, which occasions hemorrhage of the skin, this strange appearance had alarmed the nurse, who, being a Protestant, declared it was a judgment for the blood shed in the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Every one hastened in search of the doctor, in order to display his zeal and activity.

A door suddenly opened, and Catherine appeared; she traversed the antechamber and entered the king's apartment.

Charles was lying across the bed, his eyes closed, and his chest heaving; his body was covered with a reddish perspiration, and from the end of each finger hung a drop of blood.

At the sound of steps Charles looked up, and beheld his mother.

"Excuse me, madame," said he, "I would fain die in peace."

"Die!" replied Catherine; "do not thus be discouraged, this is a passing attack."

"I tell you, *mort de tout les diables!* I am dying—I know it, and I feel it!"

"Sire," said the queen, "your mind is diseased; since the death of those two assassins, La Mole and Coconnas, your bodily sufferings ought to have abated, and as for your mental anguish, if I had ten minutes' conversation with you, I could prove—"

"Nurse," interrupted Charles, "let no one enter: the Queen Catherine de Medicis wishes to speak with her beloved son, Charles the Ninth."

The nurse obeyed.

"This interview must have taken place," continued he, "sooner or later, and perhaps to-morrow it may be too late, but a third person must be present."

"Why?"

"Because, I repeat," said Charles, with a terrible solemnity, "death is at the door of this chamber, and may enter one moment from another, and it is time to put my affairs in order."

"And who is this third person?"

"My brother."

"Sire," said the queen, "I see with pleasure that these denunciations, dictated by hate rather than pain, have not left any prejudice on your mind. Nurse—nurse!" The nurse appeared.

"Nurse," said Catherine, "when M. de Nancey comes, order him in the king's name to summon M. d'Alencon."

Charles made a sign to the nurse to stay.

"I said my brother," repeated he.

Catherine's eyes glistened with rage, but an imperious gesture of Charles stopped her.

"I wish to speak with my brother Henry of Navarre," continued he; "he alone is my brother."

"And do you think," cried the queen, daring (so great was her hate to Henry) to brave Charles's anger, "do you think, that if you are really, as you say, dying, I will suffer a stranger to usurp my right as a queen and as a mother, to be present at your last moments?"

CHICOT, THE JESTER.

"Madame," said Charles, "I am yet king—I yet command; and if you will not summon Henry, I have yet strength enough left to fetch him myself."

And Charles half rose from the bed.

"Sire," cried Catherine, detaining him, "think what you do—as for me, the laws of nature and of etiquette alike bid me stay."

"By what title do you stay?"

"By that of your mother."

"You are no more my mother than D'Alencon is my brother."

"You rave! when did I forfeit that title?"

"When you took away that which you gave."

"What mean you, Charles? I do not understand you," murmured Catherine, all amazement.

Charles felt under his pillow, and drew forth a small silver key.

"Take this key, open my traveling-casket there, and you will find papers that will speak for me."

Charles pointed to a casket of carved oak, fastened with a silver lock, that stood in the center of the apartment.

Catherine, controlled, spite of herself, by Charles's terrible look, opened the casket; but no sooner had she done so, than she recoiled, as if she had seen a serpent inside it.

"What do you see that alarms you, madame?" asked Charles.

"Nothing," said Catherine.

"Then put your hand in, and give me a book; for there is one there — is there not?"

"Yes," faltered Catherine.

"A book of venerie?"——"Yes."

"Bring it to me."

Catherine, trembling in every limb, did as he bade her.

"Fatality!" murmured she.

"Listen," continued Charles. "This book—I was foolish—I loved the chase above everything—I read this book too much. Do you understand?"

Catherine uttered a suppressed groan.

"It was a folly!" said Charles. "Burn it, madame, the world must not know the weaknesses of kings."

Catherine advanced to the fire, cast the fatal book in, and stood, motionless and haggard, watching the blue flames that devoured the poisoned leaves of the volume. As it burned, a strong odor, like garlic, pervaded the apartment.

It was soon entirely consumed.

"And now, madame," said the king, with irresistible majesty, "summon my brother Henry."

Catherine, overwhelmed, crushed beneath a complicated emotion she could not analyze, quitted the room.

"Curse him!" cried she, as she passed the threshold, "he triumphs—he reaches the goal! Curse him!—curse him!"

"Henry!—my brother Henry!" cried Charles, following his mother with his voice; "I wish to see him instantly, to speak about the regency."

At this moment, Ambroise Pare entered by the opposite door.

"Who has been burning arsenic here?" said he.

"I have," replied Charles.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE PLATFORM OF THE DONJON AT VINCENNES.

HENRY OF NAVARRE was walking alone on the terrace of the donjon: he knew the court was at the chateau, and it seemed to him he could see, through the walls, Charles on his deathbed. It was a summer's eve. A broad ray of light bathed the distant plains, and gilded the stems of the old oaks in the forest.

But it was not on these objects that Henry fixed his attention; he was gazing, in thought, on the capital of France.

"Paris!" murmured he—"Paris! where is the Louvre—the Louvre, where is the throne! and here do these ramparts shut me out from thee, to confine me with my mortal enemy!"

As his thoughts wandered from Paris back to Vincennes, he saw on the left, in a valley, a man whose curiass sparkled in the sunbeams. This man was on a splendid charger, and led another.

The king fixed his eyes on this cavalier, and saw him draw his sword, place his handkerchief on it, and wave it in the air.

Instantly the signal was repeated from the next hill; and continued until the king saw it extend all round the chateau.

It was De Mouy and his Huguenots, who, knowing the king was dying, and fearing lest Henry's life should be in danger, had collected, and were ready to defend him.

Henry shaded his eyes with his hand, and recognizing the cavalier:

"De Mouy!" cried he, as though his friend could hear him.

And he hastily undid his scarf, and waved it in return.

All the handkerchiefs were again waved.

"Ah, they wait for me!" said he. "I cannot join them. Why did I not do so when it was in my power!"

And he made a despairing gesture, that De Mouy returned by another, which meant, "I will wait."

At this moment Henry heard steps on the stairs: he disappeared; and, as if by magic, the troop outside disappeared also.

Henry saw, and not without a secret dread, his mortal foe, Catherine de Medicis, appear on the terrace.

"Oh," thought he, "it must be something important, indeed, that makes her come and seek me on the platform of the donjon of Vincennes."

Catherine sat down on a stone bench, to recover her breath.

Henry approached her.

"Are you seeking me, madame?" asked he.

"Yes," replied Catherine; "I wished to give you a proof of my attachment—the king desires to see you."——"Me?"

"Yes. He thinks that not content with desiring the throne of Navarre, you covet that of France also."

"Oh, madame!"

"I know it is not true, but he believes it, and lays a snare for you."

"What will he, then, offer me?"

"How do I know?—impossibilities, perhaps."

"But have you no idea?"

"No; but suppose, for instance—"

"What?"

"Suppose, Henry, he were to offer you a temptation—the regency!"

Henry felt a thrill of joy pervade him, but he saw the snare, and avoided it.

"Oh," said he, "the trick would be too palpable; offer me the regency, when there is yourself, when there is D'Alencon!"

"You will refuse it, then?" replied Catherine.

"The king is dead," thought Henry; "she has laid a trap for me.—I must hear what the king says, madame, for you know all this is but supposition."

"Doubtless; but you can tell me your intentions."

"Mon Dieu!" said Henry, "I have no pretensions, and so can have no intentions."

"That is no answer," replied Catherine; "but to be short with you—for there is no time to lose—if you accept the regency you are a dead man."

"The king lives," thought Henry. "Madame," said he, firmly, "God will inspire me, for the hearts of kings are in His hands. I am ready to see his majesty."

"Reflect, monsieur!"

"During two years that I have been persecuted, and a month that I have been a prisoner, I have had time for reflection, and I have reflected. Favor me, therefore, by informing the king of my coming. These two guards would prevent my escape, even did I contemplate flight, which I do not."

Catherine saw she could do nothing more, and hastily descended.

No sooner had she disappeared than Henry made a sign to De Mouy, that meant, "Draw nearer."

De Mouy sprang into the saddle, and advanced within a musket-shot of the chateau.

Henry waved his hand, and hastened after the queen.

On the first landing he found the two sentinels awaiting him.

A double troop of Swiss and light horse guarded the court, and to enter or leave the chateau it was necessary to traverse a double rank of halberds. Catherine was waiting there for him.

"Look!" said she, laying her hand on his arm. "This court has two gates; at

this, behind the king's apartment, if you refuse the regency, a good horse and freedom await you. If you follow the dictates of ambition—what say you?"

"I say that if the king makes me regent, I, and not you, shall command these soldiers."

"Madman!" murmured Catherine; "be warned, and do not play at life and death with me!"

"Why not?" said Henry, "since, up to this time, I have been the gainer."

"Go to the king's apartments, sir, since you will not listen to me," said Catherine, pointing to the stairs with one hand, while the other sought the handle of one of the poisoned daggers she wore at her girdle in the shagreen case which has become historical.

"Pass before me, madame," said Henry; "until I am regent, you have the precedence." Catherine, foiled at every point, made no resistance, but ascended the stairs before Henry.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE REGENCY.

THE king had become impatient, and was on the point of sending De Nancey in search of Henry, when the latter appeared.

On seeing him, Charles uttered a cry of joy. The two doctors and the priest, who were with the king, instantly rose and quitted the chamber.

Charles was not greatly beloved, and yet all the courtiers in the antechambers were weeping. At the death of every king, good or bad, there are some persons who fear they shall lose by it.

Charles smiled mournfully.

"Come here, Harry," said he, holding out his hand to him; "come here. I was unhappy at not seeing you, for, believe me, I have often reproached myself with having tormented you; but a king cannot control events, and, besides, my mother and D'Anjou and D'Alencon, and something else, which now that I am dying does not influence me, influenced me then—state policy."

"Sire," replied Henry, "I only recollect the love I bear you as my brother."

"Ah, you are right to think thus, and I am grateful to you for it," said Charles. "But let us not think of the past, but of the future, for it is that I am alarmed about."

And the poor king hid his face in his hands.

After a moment's silence, he continued:

"We must save the state—we must not let it fall into the hands of fanatics or women."

Charles spoke these words in a low tone, and yet Henry fancied he heard a suppressed exclamation of rage.

"Of women?" said he, anxious to provoke an explanation.

"Yes, for my mother would fain be regent until D'Anjou's return; but, I tell you, he will not return."

"How, not return?" cried Henry, his heart beating joyfully.

"No, his subjects will not let him."

"But do you not think the queen-mother has already written to him?"

"Yes; but Nancey stopped the courier at Chateau Thierry, and brought me the letter, in which she said I was dying. I wrote to Warsaw myself, and D'Anjou will be carefully watched, so that in all probability the throne will become vacant."

Another angry sound was heard behind the tapestry.

"She is there," thought Henry, "and is listening." Charles heard nothing.

"I die without male heirs," continued he.

Then, stopping suddenly, he looked at the king of Navarre.

"Do you recollect, Harry," said he, "the little boy I showed you one night, sleeping peacefully in his cradle, and watched over by an angel? Alas, they will kill him also!"

"Oh no, no!" cried Henry, with tears in his eyes; "I swear to you that I will watch over and protect him with my life."

"Thanks, Harry, thanks!" said the king, gratefully; "I accept your promise; do not make him a king (fortunately, he is not born to a throne), but make him happy; I leave him an ample fortune, and I am now more resigned since you have promised to protect him."

Henry reflected.

"I have promised," said he; "but can I fulfill my word?"

"What mean you?"

"Shall I not be persecuted, and in more danger than he is, since I am a man, and he but an infant?"

"You are mistaken," said Charles; "after my death you shall be great and powerful."

At these words he drew a parchment from under his pillow. "Here!" said he.

Henry hastily glanced over the document.

"The regency for me?"

"Yes, until D'Anjou's return; and, as he will not return, in all probability it is the throne I give you."

"The throne!"

"You alone are worthy of it—you alone capable of governing. D'Alencon is a traitor—leave him in the prison I have consigned him to. My mother will seek to kill you—banish her. D'Anjou will quit Poland in three months, perhaps in a year; reply to him by a papal bull. I have already arranged that matter, and you will receive the document shortly."

"Oh, my king!"

"You have but one thing to fear—civil war; but, by remaining converted, you will avoid that. The Protestants can do nothing unless you are at their head, for Conde is comparatively nothing. They say I feel remorse for the Bartholomew: doubts, yes!—remorse, no! They say I bleed the blood then shed at every pore; what flows from me is arsenic, and not blood."

"Oh, what mean you, sire?"

"Nothing; God will, if he think fit, avenge my death. I leave you a faithful parliament and a trusty army. They will protect you against your only enemies—my mother and D'Alencon."

At this moment the sound of arms was heard in the vestibule.

"I am lost," murmured Henry.

"You fear—you hesitate," said Charles.

"No, I accept."

Charles pressed his hand.

"Nurse," cried he: "nurse, summon my mother and M. d'Alencon."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE KING IS DEAD! GOD SAVE THE KING.

CATHERINE and D'Alencon entered together. As Henry had conjectured, the queen had overheard all, and had in a few words acquainted D'Alencon with what had passed.

Henry stood by the head of the king's bed. The king commenced thus:

"Madame," said he, to his mother, "if I had a son, he would be king, and you would be regent; in your stead, did you decline, the king of Poland; in his stead, did he decline, D'Alencon; but I have no son, and the throne belongs to D'Anjou, who is absent. I do not choose, therefore, to place a man almost his equal on the throne, at the risk of exciting a civil war; I do not, therefore, make you regent, because it would be painful for you to choose between your two sons; I do not, therefore, make D'Alencon regent, because he might say to D'Anjou, 'You had a throne—why have you quitted it?' No; I have, therefore, chosen the fittest person for regent. Salute him, madame—salute him, D'Alencon: it is the king of Navarre!"

And with a gesture of supreme authority he himself saluted Henry: Catherine and D'Alencon made a motion between a shudder and a salute.

"Here, my lord regent," said Charles, "is the parchment that, until the return of D'Anjou, gives you the command of the kingdom."

Catherine devoured Henry with her eyes; D'Alencon turned deadly pale, and could hardly stand.

Henry, making a violent effort, took the warrant from Charles, and drawing himself up to his full height, fixed his eyes on the queen, as if to say, "Beware, I am your master!"

"No, never!" said Cathereine; "never shall my race yield to a foreign one! Never shall a Bourbon reign while a Valois remains!"

"Mother!" cried Charles, sitting up, "I am yet king, and have strength enough to give an order; it does not require much time to punish murderers and poisoners."

"Give the order if you dare—I will give mine!" And she left the room, followed by D'Alencon.

"Nancey!" cried Charles; "Nancey; arrest my mother and brother!" A stream of blood choked his utterance.

De Nancey entered; he had only heard his name; the rest of the order had not reached him.

"Guard the door," said Henry, "and let no one enter!"

Nancey bowed and left the apartment. Henry looked at the dying king.

"The fatal moment is come!" said he. "Shall I reign? Shall I live?"

"Live, sire!" said a voice.

The tapestry of the alcove was lifted, and Rene's pale face appeared.

"Rene?" cried Henry.

"Yes, sire."

"Your prediction was false, then—I shall not be king?"

"You shall be; but the time has not yet come."

"How do you know? Speak!"

"Listen!"—"I listen."—"Stoop!"

Henry leaned over the bed, and Rene did the same; between them lay the body of the dying king.

"Listen!" said Rene. "Placed here by the queen-mother to undo you, I prefer to serve you; for I have faith in your horoscope."

"Is it the queen-mother who bade you tell me that?"

"No," said Rene; "I will tell you a secret: the king of Poland will soon be here!"——"No—for the king stopped the courier at Chateau Thierry."

"The queen had sent three, by different routes."—"Oh, I am lost!" said Henry.

"A messenger arrived this morning from Warsaw. No one knows of Charles's illness there; D'Anjou quitted that city without opposition, and the courier only preceded him by a few hours."

"Oh, had I but eight days!" muttered Henry.

"You have not eight hours! did you not hear the noise of the arms in the vestibule? The soldiers will come even here to kill you."

"The king is not dead yet."

"No," said Rene, "but he will be in ten minutes; you have ten minutes to live."

"What shall I do, then?"

"Fly instantly."

"How? If I cross the vestibule, they will kill me there."

"Listen! I risk everything for you:—do not forget it."

"Fear me not."

"Follow me through this passage; it will conduct you to the postern. I will, to gain time, tell the queen you are coming; they will think afterward you have discovered the secret door, and escaped."

Henry stooped, and kissed Charles's forehead.

"Adieu, my brother!" said he; "I will not forget your last wish was to see me king. Die in peace; in the name of my brethren I forgive you their blood you have spilled."

Henry seized Charles's sword, placed the precious parchment in his breast, pressed his lips again to Charles's forehead, and disappeared by the secret passage.

"Nurse!" murmured the king; "nurse!"

"What do you want, Charlot?" cried she.

"Nurse, while I have been sleeping, something strange has happened; for I see a great light, and saints interceding with God for me. Pardon me, my God! Pardon the crimes of the king, in compassion for the sufferings of the man! I come! I come!"

And Charles, who had risen nearly to his feet, fell back dead into his nurse's arms.

Meantime, Henry, guided by Rene, traversed the passage, passed through the postern, and springing on his horse, galloped toward De Mouy.

The sentinels, hearing the horse, moved forward and cried: "He flies—he flies!"

"Who flies?" said the queen.

"The king of Navarre."

"Fire on him—fire!" said the queen.

The sentinels leveled their pieces, but the king was out of reach.

"He flies!" said Catherine; "he is vanquished, then!"

"He flies!" muttered D'Alencon; "I am king, then!"

But at this moment the drawbridge was hastily lowered, and a young man galloped into the court, followed by four gentlemen crying, "*France, France!*"

"My son!" cried Catherine, joyfully.

"My mother!" replied the young man, springing to the ground.

"D'Anjou!" exclaimed Francois, thunderstruck.

"Am I too late?" said Henry d'Anjou.

"No, you are just in time—listen!"

At this moment De Nancey appeared at the balcony of the king's apartment: all eyes were fixed on him.

He broke a wand he held in two pieces, and holding a fragment in either hand:

"King Charles the Ninth is dead! King Charles the Ninth is dead! King Charles the Ninth is dead!" cried he three times. And he let fall the fragments of the wand.

"Charles the Ninth is dead!" said Catherine, crossing herself; "God save Henry the Third!"

All repeated the cry, with the exception of D'Alencon.

"She has betrayed me," said he.

"I have conquered," cried Catherine, "and the odious Béarnais will not reign!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

EPILOGUE.

A YEAR had elapsed since the death of Charles IX., and the accession of his successor.

King Henry III., happily reigning by the grace of God and his mother Catherine, had gone in a fine procession in honor of Notre-Dame de Clery.

He had gone on foot with the queen, his wife, and all the court.

King Henry III. was able to afford himself this little pastime, for no serious business occupied him at the moment: the king of Navarre was in Navarre, where he had so long desired to be; and they said was very much taken up with a beautiful girl of the blood of the Montmorencies, whom he called *la Fosseuse* (dimple-cheek). Marguerite was with him, sad and gloomy, and finding only in her beautiful mountains, not an amusement, but a soother of the two great griefs of human life—absence and death.

Paris was very quiet, and the queen-mother, really regent since her dear son Henry was king, resided sometimes at the Louvre, sometimes at the Hotel de Soissons.

One evening, when she was deeply occupied in studying the stars with Rene, whose little treason she had never detected, and who had been reinstated in her favor, after the false testimony he had so opportunely borne against La Mole and Coconnas, she was informed that a man desired to see her who had a matter of the utmost importance to communicate.

She went hastily to her oratory, and found the Sirè de Maurevel.

"HE is here!" exclaimed the ancient captain of the Petardiers, not giving Catherine time to address him, according to royal etiquette.

"What HE?" she asked.

"Who can it be, madame, but the king of Navarre?"

"Here?" cried Catherine. "Here!—he—Henry!—and what is the madman doing here?"

"If appearances may be trusted, he has come to see Madame de Sauve; if probabilities are considered, he comes to conspire against the king."

"How did you know he was here?"

"Because I saw him enter a house here yesterday, and, very soon afterward, Madame de Sauve joined him there."

"Are you sure it was he?"

"I waited until he came out. At three o'clock, the two lovers appeared. The king conducted Madame de Sauve to the wicket of the Louvre. There the porter, who is no doubt in her interest, admitted her, and she entered without interruption, and the king returned humming a tune, and with a step as free and unconcerned as if he were among his mountains in Béarn."

"And whither did he betake himself?"

"Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, to the hotel of the Belle Etoile, at the same man's where the two sorcerers lodged whom your majesty executed last year."

"Why did you not come and inform me the moment you first saw him?"

"Because I was not quite sure of my man."

"While now—"

"I am perfectly certain."

"You saw him, then?"

"Perfectly. I concealed myself at the wine shop in front of the house, and saw him enter the same place as on the previous night. Then, as Madame de Sauve was late, he imprudently put his face against the window on the first-floor, and then I had no further doubt. Besides, a few moments afterward, Madame de Sauve came and rejoined him."

"And do you think they will remain, as they did last night, until three o'clock in the morning?"

"It is probable."

"Where is the house you mention?"

"Near the Croix-des-Petits-Champs, close by Saint Honore."

"Very good!" replied Catherine. "Does Monsieur de Sauve know your handwriting?"

"No," said Maurevel.

"Sit down there and write."

Maurevel obeyed.

"I am ready, madame," said he.

Catherine dictated:

"While the Baron de Sauve is on service at the Louvre, his wife is with her lover in a house near the Croix-des-Petits-Champs, Rue Saint Honore. The baron will recognize the house by a red cross on the wall."——"Well?"

"Now make a second copy of this letter." Maurevel did so.

"Now," continued the queen, "let this billet be given adroitly to the baron, and let fall the other in the corridor of the Louvre."

"I do not understand."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders.

"You do not see that a husband who receives such a letter must be angry."

"In the king of Navarre's time he was not offended."

"Do you not know there is a great difference between a king and an exile? Besides, if he is not offended, you will be for him."——"I?"

"Yes; take four or six men, masked. You burst open the door—you surprise the lovers—you strike, in the baron's name, and the next day, the letter found in the Louvre proves that it is the husband who revenged himself, only it happened the lover was the king of Navarre; but who could think he was there, when every one believed he was at Pau?"

Maurevel bowed and withdrew.

Just as he quitted the Hotel de Soissons, Madame de Sauve entered the house of the Croix-des-Petits-Champs.

Henry was waiting for her.

"Have you been followed?" said he.

"No," said Charlotte, "not that I know of."

"I think I have; not only to-night, but last evening also."

"Oh, sire, you terrify me. I should be inconsolable if anything were to happen to you."

"Fear nothing, love," said the Béarnais, "three faithful followers watch over me."

"Only three?"

"Three are sufficient, when they are called De Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthelemy."

"De Mouy is then at Paris? Has he, like you, some poor lady in love with him?"

"No; but a mortal enemy, whose death he has sworn to compass. Nothing else but hate makes men commit such follies as they commit in love."

"Thank you, sire!"

"Oh, I do not speak of our present follies, but those past and to come. But let us leave off this conversation, for my time is short."

"You leave Paris, then?"

"To-night."

"Your affairs in Paris are finished?"

"My only business was to see you."

"Gascon!"

"Ma mie, it is true; but we have a few more hours to pass together, and then we separate forever."

"Oh, Henry," said Charlotte, "nothing but my love lasts forever."

It was arranged that Henry should leave the house at twelve o'clock, that he and his companions should escort Madame de Sauve to the Louvre, and should go from thence to the Rue de Cerisaie, where Maurevel dwelt.

The three Huguenots had been on guard about an hour when they saw a man, followed at some distance by five others, approach the door of the house, and apply successively several keys to the lock.

At this sight, De Mouy sprang from his concealment, and catching the man by the arm:

"Stay!" said he; "you do not enter there!"

The man started, and his hat fell off.

"De Mouy de Saint-Phale!" cried he.

"Maurevel!" thundered the Huguenot, brandishing his sword; "I sought you, and you come to find me!"

But he did not forget Henry, and turning to the window, he whistled like the Béarnese shepherds.

"That is sufficient," said he to Saucourt.

"Now then, murderer!"

Maurevel had time to draw a pistol from his belt, and leveling it at the young man:

"This time," said the king's slayer, "you are dead."

But De Mouy sprang on one side, and the ball passed by him.

"It is my turn now!" cried he; and he dealt Maurevel so terrible a thrust with his rapier, that it traversed his thick buff belt, and inflicted a severe wound.

Maurevel uttered so piercing a cry that his followers thought he was killed, and ran away down the Rue St. Honore.

Maurevel, seeing himself abandoned, took to flight, crying, "Help! help!"

De Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthelemy pursued him hotly.

As they entered the Rue de Grenelle, a man sprang out of a window on the first-floor.

It was Henry.

Warned by De Mouy's signal, and by the report of the pistol, that something had occurred, he hastened to the assistance of his friends.

Active and vigorous, he dashed after them sword in hand.

A cry guided him; it came from the Barrier des Sergens; it was Maurevel, who, hard pressed by De Mouy. called again for help.

He was forced to turn, or else be run through the back: he turned, therefore, and thrust fiercely at De Mouy, and pierced his scarf; De Mouy lunged in his turn, and a second time wounded him.

"At him—at him!" cried Henry.

De Mouy needed no exhortation: he charged Maurevel again, who, pressing his hand over his wound, took to flight once more.

"Kill him quickly!" cried the king. "Here are the soldiers!"

Maurevel, breathless and exhausted, could go no further; he fell on one knee, and presented his sword-point to De Mouy.

"They are only two!" cried he. "Fire—fire!"

Saucourt and Barthelemy had been carried away in pursuit of the other soldiers. so that De Mouy and the king found themselves opposed to four men.

"Fire!" cried Maurevel, while one of the soldiers prepared his arquebuse.

"Yes; but first die — assassin, murderer, traitor—die!"

So saying, De Mouy seized Maurevel's sword with one hand, and plunged his own so violently into his breast, that he pinned him to the earth.

"Take care—take care!" cried Henry.

De Mouy sprang back, leaving his sword in the body of Maurevel, for a soldier was in the act of firing at him.

Henry instantly passed his sword through the soldier's body, who fell, uttering a cry.

The two others betook themselves to flight.

"Come, De Mouy, come!" said Henry. "We have not a moment to lose; if we are recognized, we are lost!"

"One moment, sire, while I recover my sword. You do not suppose I would leave it sticking in the body of that wretch!"

He went toward Maurevel, who lay, to all appearance, deprived of motion, but the moment that De Mouy laid his hand on the hilt of the sword which had remained in his body, he raised himself, with the petronel in his hand, which the soldier had dropped as he fell, and placing the muzzle full against De Mouy's breast, pulled the trigger.

De Mouy fell without a cry. He was killed outright.

Henry rushed toward Maurevel, but he had fallen again, and the king's sword pierced only a dead carcase.

It was necessary for him to flee; the noise had attracted a great number of persons, and the guard might arrive. Henry then looked about him, to see if there was a face he knew, and gave a cry of joy, as he recognized Maitre la Huriere.

"My dear La Huriere, look after De Mouy, I pray you; although I have great fear that he is past hope. Have him taken to your house, and if he still lives, spare no expense—here is my purse: as to the other, leave the scoundrel to rot in the kennel like a dog!"

"But yourself?" said La Huriere.

"I have a farewell to make. I will hasten, and be back with you in ten minutes. Have my horses ready."

Henry then hastened away in the direction of the little house in the Croix-des-Petits-Champs; but as he turned the corner, he stopped, in great alarm.

There was a great crowd before the door.

"What has happened in this house?" inquired Henry.

"Oh," replied a bystander, "a terrible affair, sir! A beautiful lady has been stabbed by her husband, to whom some one had sent a note, informing him that she was there with her lover."

"And the husband?" cried Henry.

"Has gone."

"The wife?"

"Is there still."

"Dead?"

"Not yet; but there is no hope."

"Oh," exclaimed Henry, "cursed fate!" and he rushed into the house.

The room was filled with people, all surrounding the bed on which lay poor Charlotte, stabbed with two blows of a poniard. Her husband, who had for two years concealed his jealousy of Henry, had seized this opportunity of avenging himself.

"Charlotte, Charlotte!" cried Henry, falling on his knees at the bedside.

Charlotte opened her beautiful eyes, already veiled by death, and gave a cry which made the blood flow from her two wounds; and making an effort to rise, she said: "Oh, I was sure I could not die without seeing him once more!"

And, as if she had awaited the moment of Henry's coming to die, she pressed her lips on the king of Navarre's forehead, and murmuring for the last time, "I love thee!" fell back, and expired.

Henry could not remain a moment longer without his life being in jeopardy. He drew his dagger, cut off one of those long and fair tresses he had so often admired and pressed to his lips, and sobbing bitterly, amid the sobs of the lookers-on, who had no idea that their sympathies were excited for persons of such high estate, left the room.

"Friend, mistress," cried Henry, in despair; "all forsake me, all leave me, all fail me at once."

"Yes, sire," said a man who had quitted the group before the house, and followed Henry: "but the throne is still left to you."

"René!" cried Henry.

"Yes, sire, René—who still watches over you. The wretch Maurevel named you as he died. They know you are in Paris—the archers are seeking for you—fly! fly!"

"And yet you say, René, that I, a fugitive, shall be king?"

"Look, sire," said the Florentine, pointing out to the king a star which appeared alone, brilliant among the folds of a golden cloud; "it is not I who say so, but *that!*"

Henry heaved a sigh and disappeared in the darkness.

THE END OF "MARGUERITE DE VALOIS."

CHICOT, THE JESTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE WEDDING OF ST. LUC.

On the evening of a Sunday, in the year 1578, a splendid fete was given in the magnificent hotel built just opposite the Louvre, on the other side of the water, by the family of Montmorency, who, allied to the royalty of France, held themselves equal to princes. This fete was to celebrate the wedding of Francois d'Epinay de St. Luc, a great friend and favorite of the king, Henri III., with Jeanne de Cosse-Brissac, daughter of the marshal of that name.

The banquet had taken place at the Louvre, and the king, who had been with much difficulty induced to consent to the marriage, had appeared at it with a severe and grave countenance. His costume was in harmony with his face; he wore that suit of deep chestnut, in which Clouet described him at the wedding of Joyeuse; and this kind of royal specter, solemn and majestic, had chilled all the spectators, but above all the young bride, at whom he cast many angry glances. The reason of all this was known to every one, but was one of those court secrets of which no one likes to speak.

Scarcely was the repast finished, when the king had risen abruptly, thereby forcing every one to do the same. Then St. Luc approached him, and said: "Sire, will your majesty do me the honor to accept the fete, which I wish to give to you this evening at the Hotel Montmorency?" This was said in an imploring tone, but Henri, with a voice betraying both vexation and anger, had replied:

"Yes, monsieur, we will go, although you certainly do not merit this proof of friendship on our part."

Then Madame de St. Luc had humbly thanked the king, but he turned his back without replying.

"Is the king angry with you?" asked the young wife of her husband.

"I will explain it to you after, mon amie, when this anger shall have passed away."

"And will it pass away?"

"It must."

Mademoiselle de Brissac was not yet sufficiently Madame de St. Luc to insist further; therefore she repressed her curiosity, promising herself to satisfy it at a more favorable time.

They were, therefore, expecting St. Luc at the Hotel Montmorency, at the moment in which our story commences. St. Luc had invited all the king's friends and all his own; the princes and their favorites, particularly those of the Duc d'Anjou. He was always in opposition to the king, but in a hidden manner, pushing forward those of his friends whom the example of La Mole and Coconnas had not cured. Of course, his favorites and those of the king lived in a state of antagonism, which brought on rencontres two or three times a month, in which it was rare that some one was not killed or badly wounded.

As for Catherine, she was at the height of her wishes; her favorite son was on the throne, and she reigned through him, while she pretended to care no more for the things of this world. St. Luc, very uneasy at the absence of all the royal family, tried to reassure his father-in-law,

who was much distressed at this menacing absence. Convinced, like all the world, of the friendship of Henry for St. Luc, he had believed he was assuring the royal favor, and now this looked like a disgrace. St. Luc tried hard to inspire in them a security which he did not feel himself; and his friends, Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quelus, clothed in their most magnificent dresses, stiff in their splendid doublets, with enormous frills, added to his annoyance by their ironical lamentations.

"Eh! mon Dieu! my poor friend," said Jacques de Levis, comte de Quelus, "I believe now that you are done for. The king is angry that you would not take his advice, and M. d'Anjou because you laughed at his nose."

"No, Quelus, the king does not come, because he has made a pilgrimage to the monks of the Bois de Vincennes; and the Duc d'Anjou is absent, because he is in love with some woman whom I have forgotten to invite."

"But," said Maugiron, "did you see the king's face at dinner? And as for the duke, if he could not come, his gentlemen might. There is not one here, not even Bussy."

"Oh! gentlemen," said the Duc de Brissac, in a despairing tone, "it looks like a complete disgrace. Mon Dieu! how can our house, always so devoted to his majesty, have displeased him?"

The young men received this speech with bursts of laughter, which did not tend to soothe the marquis. The young bride was also wondering how St. Luc could have displeased the king. All at once one of the doors opened and the king was announced.

"Ah!" cried the marshal, "now I fear nothing; if the Duc d'Anjou would but come, my satisfaction would be complete."

"And I," murmured St. Luc; "I have more fear of the king present than absent, for I fear he comes to play me some spiteful tricks."

But, nevertheless, he ran to meet the king, who had quitted at last his somber costume, and advanced resplendent in satin, feathers, and jewels. But at the instant he entered another door opened just opposite, and a second Henri III., clothed exactly like the first, appeared, so that the courtiers, who had run to meet the first, turned round at once to look at the second. Henri III. saw the movement, and exclaimed:

"What is the matter, gentlemen?"

A burst of laughter was the reply. The king, not naturally patient, and less so that day than usual, frowned; but St. Luc approached, and said:

"Sire, it is Chicot, your jester, who is dressed exactly like your majesty, and is giving his hand to the ladies to kiss."

Henri laughed. Chicot enjoyed at his court a liberty similar to that enjoyed thirty years before by Triboulet at the court of Francois I., and forty years after by Longely at the court of Louis XIII. Chicot was not an ordinary jester. Before being Chicot he had been "De Chicot." He was a Gascon gentleman, who, ill-treated by M. de Mayenne on account of a rivalry in a love affair, in which Chicot had been victorious, had taken refuge at court, and prayed the king for his protection by telling him the truth.

"Eh, M. Chicot," said Henri, "two kings at a time are too much"

"Then," replied he, "let me continue to be one, and you play Duc d'Anjou; perhaps you will be taken for him, and learn something of his doings."

"So," said Henri, looking round him, "Anjou is not here."

"The more reason for you to replace him. It is settled, I am Henri, and you are Francois. I will play the king, while you dance and amuse yourself a little, poor king."

"You are right, Chicot, I will dance."

"Decidedly," thought De Brissac, "I was wrong to think the king angry; he is in an excellent humor."

Meanwhile St. Luc had approached his wife. She was not a beauty, but she had fine black eyes, white teeth, and a dazzling complexion.

"Monsieur," said she to her husband, "why did they say that the king was angry with me; he has done nothing but smile on me ever since he came?"

"You did not say so after dinner, dear Jeanne, for his look then frightened you."

"His majesty was, doubtless, out of humor then, but now—"

"Now, it is far worse; he smiles with closed lips. I would rather he showed me his teeth. Jeanne, my poor child, he is preparing for us some disagreeable surprise. Oh! do not look at me so tenderly, I beg; turn your back to me. Here is Maugiron coming; converse with him, and be amiable to him."

"That is a strange recommendation, monsieur."

But St. Luc left his wife full of astonishment, and went to pay his court to Chicot, who was playing his part with a most laughable majesty.

The king danced, but seemed never to lose sight of St. Luc. Sometimes he called him to repeat to him some pleasantry, which, whether droll or not, made St. Luc laugh heartily. Sometimes he offered him out of his comfit box sweetmeats and candied fruits, which St. Luc found excellent. If he disappeared for an instant, the king sent for him, and seemed not happy if he was out of his sight. All at once a voice rose above all the tumult.

"Oh!" said Henri, "I think I hear the voice of Chicot; do you hear, St. Luc?—the king is angry."

"Yes, sire, it sounds as though he were quarreling with some one."

"Go and see what it is, and come back and tell me."

As St. Luc approached he heard Chicot crying:

"I have made sumptuary laws, but if they are not enough I will make more; at least they shall be numerous, if they are not good. By the horn of Beelzebub, six pages, M. de Bussy, are too much."

And Chicot, swelling out his cheeks, and putting his hand to his side, imitated the king to the life.

"What does he say about Bussy?" asked the king, when St. Luc returned. St. Luc was about to reply, when the crowd opening, showed to him six pages, dressed in cloth of gold, covered with chains, and bearing on their breasts the arms of their masters, sparkling in jewels. Behind them came a young man, handsome and proud, who walked with his head raised and a haughty look, and whose simple dress of black velvet contrasted with the splendor of his pages. This was Bussy d'Amboise. Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quelus had drawn near to the king.

"See," said Maugiron, "here is the servant, but where is the master? Are you also in disgrace with him, St. Luc?"

"Why should he follow Bussy?" said Quelus.

"Do you not remember that when his majesty did M. de Bussy the honor to ask him if he wished to belong to him, he replied that, being of the house of Clermont, he followed no one, and belonged to himself."

The king frowned.

"Yet," said Maugiron, "whatever you say, he serves the Duc d'Anjou."

"Then it is because the duke is greater than the king."

No observation could have been more annoying to the king than this, for he detested the Duc d'Anjou. Thus, although he did not answer, he grew pale.

"Come, come, gentlemen," said St. Luc, trembling, "a little charity for my guests, if you please; do not spoil my wedding-day."

"Yes," said the king, in a mocking tone; "do not spoil St. Luc's wedding-day."

"Oh!" said Schomberg, "is Bussy allied to the Brissacs?—since St. Luc defends him."

"He is neither my friend nor relation, but he is my guest," said St. Luc. The king gave an angry look. "Besides," he hastened to add, "I do not defend him the least in the world."

Bussy approached gravely behind his pages to salute the king, when Chicot cried:

"Oh, la! Bussy d'Amboise, Louis de Clermont, comte de Bussy, do you not see the true Henri, do you not know the true king from the false? He to whom you are going is Chicot, my jester, at whom I so often laugh."

Bussy continued his way, and was about

to bow before the king, when he said: "Do you not hear, M. de Bussy, you are called?" and, amid shouts of laughter from his minions, he turned his back to the young captain. Bussy reddened with anger, but he affected to take the king's remark seriously, and turning round toward Chicot:

"Ah! pardon, sire," said he, "there are kings who resemble jesters so much, that you will excuse me, I hope, for having taken a jester for a king."

"Hein," murmured Henri, "what does he say?"

"Nothing, sire," said St. Luc.

"Nevertheless, M. Bussy," said Chicot; "it was unpardonable."

"Sire, I was preoccupied."

"With your pages, monsieur," said Chicot; "you ruin yourself in pages, and, par la mordieu, it is infringing our prerogatives."

"How so? I beg your majesty to explain."

"Cloth of gold for them, while you, a gentleman, a colonel, a Clermont, almost a prince, wear simple black velvet."

"Sire," said Bussy, turning toward the king's minions, "as we live in a time when lackeys dress like princes, I think it good taste for princes to dress like lackeys."

And he returned to the young men in their splendid dress the impertinent smiles which they had bestowed on him a little before. They grew pale with fury, and seemed only to wait the king's permission to fall upon Bussy.

"Is it for me and mine that you say that?" asked Chicot, speaking like the king.

Three friends of Bussy's now drew near to him. These were Charles d'Antragues, Francois, vicomte de Ribeirac, and Livarot. Seeing all this, St. Luc guessed that Bussy was sent by Monsieur to provoke a quarrel. He trembled more than ever, for he feared the combatants were about to take his house for a battle-field. He ran to Quelus, who already had his hand on his sword, and said, "In Heaven's name be moderate."

"Parbleu, he attacks you as well as us."

"Quelus, think of the Duc d'Anjou, who supports Bussy; you do not suppose I fear Bussy himself?"

"Eh! Mordieu, what need we fear; we belong to the king. If we get into peril for him he will help us."

"You, yes; but me," said St. Luc, piteously.

"Ah, dame, why do you marry, knowing how jealous the king is in his friendships?"

"Good," thought St. Luc, "every one for himself; and as I wish to live tranquil during the first fortnight of my marriage, I will make friends with M. Bussy." And he advanced toward him. After his impertinent speech, Bussy had looked round the room to see if any one would take notice of it. Seeing St. Luc approach, he thought he had found what he sought.

"Monsieur," said he, "is it to what I said just now that I owe the honor of the conversation you appear to desire?"

"Of what you have just said, I heard nothing. No, I saw you, and wished to salute you, and thank you for the honor you have done me by your presence here."

Bussy, who knew the courage of St. Luc, understood at once that he considered the duties of a host paramount, and answered him politely.

Henri, who had seen the movement, said, "Oh, oh! I fear there is mischief there; I cannot have St. Luc killed. Go and see, Quelus; no, you are too rash—you, Maugiron."

But St. Luc did not let him approach Bussy, but came to meet him, and returned with him to the king.

"What have you been saying to that coxcomb?" asked the king.

"I, sire?"——"Yes, you."

"I said, good-evening."

"Oh! was that all?"

St. Luc saw he was wrong. "I said, good-evening; adding, that I would have the honor of saying good-morning tomorrow."

"Ah! I suspected it."

"Will your majesty keep my secret?" said St. Luc.

"Oh! parbleu, if you could get rid of him without injury to yourself—"

The minions exchanged a rapid glance, which Henri III. seemed not to notice.

"For," continued he, "his insolence is too much."

"Yes, yes," said St. Luc, "but some day he will find his master."

"Oh!" said the king, "he manages the sword well. Why does he not get bit by some dog?" And he threw a spiteful glance on Bussy, who was walking about, laughing at all the king's friends.

"Corbleu!" cried Chicot, "do not be so rude to my friends, M. Bussy, for I draw the sword, though I am a king, as well as if I was a common man."

"If he continue such pleasantries, I will chastise Chicot, sire," said Maugiron.

"No, no, Maugiron, Chicot is a gentleman. Besides, it is not he who most deserves punishment, for it is not he who is most insolent."

This time there was no mistaking, and Quelus made signs to D'O and D'Epernon, who had been in a different part of the room, and had not heard what was going on. "Gentlemen," said Quelus, "come to the council; you, St. Luc, go and finish making your peace with the king."

St. Luc approached the king, while the others drew back into a window.

"Well," said D'Epernon, "what do you want? I was making love, and I warn you, if your recital be not interesting I shall be very angry."

"I wish to tell you that after the ball I set off for the chase."

"For what chase?"

"That of the wild boar."

"What possesses you to go, in this cold, to be killed in some thicket?"

"Never mind, I am going."

"Alone?"

"No, with Maugiron and Schomberg. We hunt for the king."

"Ah! yes, I understand," said Maugiron and Schomberg.

"The king wishes a boar's head for breakfast to-morrow."

"With the neck dressed à l'Italienne," said Maugiron, alluding to the turn-down collar which Bussy wore in opposition to their ruffs.

"Ah, ah," said D'Epernon, "I understand."

"What is it?" asked D'O, "for I do not."

"Ah! look round you."

"Well!"

"Did any one laugh at us here?"

"Yes, Bussy."

"Well, that is the wild boar the king wants."

"You think the king—"

"He asks for it."

"Well, then, so be it. But how do we hunt?"

"In ambush; it is the surest."

Bussy remarked the conference, and, not doubting that they were talking of him, approached, with his friends.

"Look, Antragues, look Ribeirac," said he, "how they are grouped; it is quite touching; it might be Euryale and Nisus, Damon and Pythias, Castor and—. But where is Pollux?"

"Pollux is married, so that Castor is left alone."

"What can they be doing?"

"I bet they are inventing some new starch."

"No, gentlemen," said Quelus, "we are talking of the chase."

"Really, Signor Cupid," said Bussy; "it is very cold for that. It will chap your skin."

"Monsieur," replied Maugiron, politely, "we have warm gloves, and doublets lined with fur."

"Ah! that reassures me," said Bussy; "do you go soon?"

"To-night, perhaps."

"In that case I must warn the king; what will he say to-morrow, if he finds his friends have caught cold?"

"Do not give yourself that trouble, monsieur," said Quelus, "his majesty knows it."

"Do you hunt larks?" asked Bussy, with an impertinent air.

"No, monsieur, we hunt the boar. We want a head. Will you hunt with us, M. Bussy?"

"No, really, I cannot. To-morrow I must go to the Duc d'Anjou for the reception of M. de Monsoreau, to whom

monseigneur has just given the place of chief huntsman."

"But, to-night?"

"Ah! to-night, I have a rendezvous in a mysterious house of the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Epernon, "is the Queen Margot here, incognito, M. de Bussy?"

"No, it is some one else."

"Who expects you in the Faubourg St. Antoine?"

"Just so, indeed I will ask your advice, M. de Quelus."

"Do so, although I am not a lawyer, I give very good advice."

"They say the streets of Paris are unsafe, and that it is a lonely place. Which way do you counsel me to take?"

"Why, I advise you to take the ferry-boat at the Pre-aux-Clercs, get out at the corner, and follow the quay until you arrive at the great Chatelet, and then go through the Rue de la Tixanderie, until you reach the faubourg. Once at the corner of the Rue St. Antoine, if you pass the Hotel des Tournelles without accident, it is probable you will arrive safe and sound at your mysterious house."

"Thanks for your route, M. de Quelus, I shall be sure to folow it." And saluting the five friends, he went away.

As Bussy was crossing the last salon where Madame de St. Luc was, her husband made a sign to her. She understood at once, and going up, stopped him.

"Oh! M. de Bussy," said she, "every one is talking of a sonnet you have made."

"Against the king, madame?"

"No, in honor of the queen; do tell it to me."

"Willingly, madame," and offering his arm to her, he went off, repeating it.

During this time, St. Luc drew softly near his friends, and heard Quelus say:

"The animal will not be difficult to follow; thus then, at the corner of the Hotel des Tournelles, opposite the Hotel St. Pol."

"With each a lackey?" asked D'Epernon.

"No, no, Nogaret, let us be alone, and keep our own secret, and do our own work. I hate him, but he is too much a gentleman for a lackey to touch."

"Shall we go out all six together?"

"All five, if you please," said St. Luc.

"Ah! it is true, we forgot your wife."

They heard the king's voice calling St. Luc.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the king calls me. Good sport, au revoir."

And he left them, but instead of going straight to the king, he ran to where Bussy stood with his wife.

"Ah! monsieur, how hurried you seem," said Bussy. "Are you going also to join the chase; it would be a proof of your courage, but not of your gallantry."

"Monsieur, I was seeking you."

"Really."

"And I was afraid you were gone. Dear Jeanne, tell your father to try and stop the king, while I say a few words tete-à-tete to M. Bussy." Jeanne went.

"I wish to say to you, monsieur," continued St. Luc, "that if you have any rendezvous to-night, you would do well to put it off, for the streets are not safe, and, above all, to avoid the Hotel des Tournelles, where there is a place where several men could hide. This is what I wished to say; I know you fear nothing, but reflect."

At this moment they heard Chicot's voice crying, "St. Luc, St. Luc, do not hide yourself, I am waiting for you to return to the Louvre."

"Here I am, sire," cried St. Luc, rushing forward. Near Chicot stood the king, to whom one page was giving his ermine mantle, and another a velvet mask lined with satin.

"Sire," said St. Luc, "I will have the honor of lighting your majesties to your litters."

"No," said Henri, "Chicot goes one way, and I another. My friends are good-for-nothings, who have run away and left me to return alone to the Louvre. I had counted on them, and you cannot let me go alone. You are a grave married man, and must take me back to the queen. Come, my friend, my litter is large enough for two."

Madame de St. Luc, who had heard this, tried to speak, and to tell her father that the king was carrying away her husband, but he, placing his fingers on his mouth, motioned her to be silent.

"I am ready, sire," said he, "to follow you."

When the king took leave, the others followed, and Jeanne was left alone. She entered her room, and knelt down before the image of a saint to pray, then sat down to wait for her husband's return. M. de Brissac sent six men to the Louvre to attend him back. But two hours after one of them returned, saying, that the Louvre was closed, and that before closing, the captain of the watch had said, "It is useless to wait longer, no one will leave the Louvre to-night; his majesty is in bed."

The marshal carried this news to his daughter.

CHAPTER II.

HOW IT IS NOT ALWAYS HE WHO OPENS THE DOOR WHO ENTERS THE HOUSE.

THE Porte St. Antoine was a kind of vault in stone, similar to our present Porte St. Denis, only it was attached by its left side to buildings adjacent to the Bastille. The space at the right, between the gate and the Hotel des Tournelles, was large and dark, little frequented by day, and quite solitary at night, for all passers-by took the side next to the fortress, so as to be in some degree under the protection of the sentinel. Of course, winter nights were still more feared than summer ones.

That on which the events which we have recounted, and are about to recount, took place, was cold and black. Before the gate on the side of the city was no house, but only high walls, those of the church of St. Paul, and of the Hotel des Tournelles. At the end of this wall was the niche of which St. Luc had spoken to Bussy. No lamps lighted this part of Paris at that epoch. In the nights when the moon charged herself with the lighting of the earth, the Bastille rose somber and majestic against the starry blue of the skies, but on dark nights there seemed only a thickening of the shadows where it stood. On the night in question, a practiced eye might have detected in the angle of the wall of the Tournelles several black shades, which moved enough to show that they belonged to poor devils of human bodies, who seemed to find it difficult to preserve their natural warmth as they stood there. The sentinel from the Bastille, who could not see them on account of the darkness, could not hear them either, for they talked almost in whispers. However, the conversation did not want interest.

"This Bussy was right," said one; "it is a night such as we had at Warsaw, when Henri was king of Poland, and if this continues we shall freeze."

"Come, Maugiron, you complain like a woman," replied another; "it is not warm, I confess; but draw your mantle over your eyes, and put your hands in your pockets, and you will not feel it."

"Really, Schomberg," said a third, "it is easy to see you are German. As for me, my lips bleed, and my mustachios are stiff with ice."

"It is my hands," said a fourth; "on my honor, I would not swear I had any."

"You should have taken your mamma's muff, poor Quelus," said Schomberg.

"Eh! mon Dieu, have patience," said a fifth voice; "you will soon be complaining you are hot."

"I see some one coming through the Rue St. Paul," said Quelus.

"It cannot be him; he named another route."

"Might he not have suspected something, and changed it?"

"You do not know Bussy; where he said he should go, he would go, if he knew that Satan himself were barring his passage."

"However, here are two men coming."

"Ma foi! yes."

"Let us charge," said Schomberg.

"One moment," said D'Epernon; "do not let us kill good bourgeois, or poor women. Hold! they stop."

In fact, they had stopped, and looked as if undecided.

"Oh, can they have seen us?"

"We can hardly see ourselves!"

"See, they turn to the left; they stop before a house they are seeking—they are trying to enter; they will escape us!"

"But it is not him, for he was going to the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"Oh! how do you know he told you right?"

At this supposition they all rushed out, sword in hand, toward the gentlemen.

One of the men had just introduced a key into the lock; the door had yielded and was about to open, when the noise of their assailants made them turn.

"What is this? Can it be against us, Aurilly?" said one.

"Ah, monseigneur," said the other, who had opened the door, "it looks like it. Will you name yourself, or keep incognito?"

"Armed men—an ambush!"

"Some jealous lover; I said the lady was too beautiful not to be watched."

"Let us enter quickly, Aurilly; we are safer within doors."

"Yes, monseigneur, if there are not enemies within; but how do you know—"

He had not time to finish. The young men rushed up; Quelus and Maugiron made for the door to prevent their entering, while Schomberg, D'O, and D'Epernon prepared to attack in front. But he who had been called monseigneur turned toward Quelus, who was in front, and crossing his arms proudly, said: "You attack a son of France, M. Quelus!"

Quelus drew back, trembling and thunderstruck. "Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" he cried.

"The Duc d'Anjou!" repeated the others.

"Well, gentlemen," cried the duke.

"Monseigneur," stammered D'Epernon, "it was a joke; forgive us."

"Monseigneur," said D'O, "we did not dream of meeting your highness here!"

"A joke!" said the duke; "you have an odd manner of joking, M. d'Epernon. Since it was not intended for me, whom [illegible] your jest menace?"

"Monseigneur," said Schomberg; "we saw St. Luc quit the Hotel Montmorency and come this way; it seemed strange to us, and we wished to see what took him out on his wedding night."

"M. de St. Luc—you took me for him?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"M. de St. Luc is a head taller than I am."

"It is true, monseigneur; but he is just the height of M. Aurilly."

"And seeing a man put a key in a lock, we took him for the principal," added D'O.

"Monseigneur cannot suppose that we had the shadow of an ill-will toward him, even to disturb his pleasures?"

As he listened, the duke, by a skillful movement, had, little by little, quitted the door, followed by Aurilly, and was now at some distance off.

"My pleasures!" said he, angrily; "what makes you think I was seeking pleasure?"

"Ah, monseigneur, in any case pardon us, and let us retire," said Quelus.

"It is well; adieu, gentlemen; but first listen. I was going to consult the Jew Manasses, who reads the future; he lives, as you know, in Rue de la Tournelle. In passing, Aurilly saw you, and took you for the watch, and we, therefore, tried to hide ourselves in a doorway. And now you know what to believe and say; it is needless to add, that I do not wish to be followed," and he turned away.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I am sure these men have bad intentions; it is near midnight, and this is a lonely quarter; let us return home, I beg."

"No, no; let us profit by their departure."

"Your highness is deceived; they have not gone, but have returned to their retreat: look in the angle of the Hotel des Tournelles."

Francois looked, and saw that Aurilly was right; it was evident that they waited for something, perhaps to see if the duke were really going to the Jew.

"Well, monseigneur," continued Aurilly, "do you not think it will be more prudent to go home?"

"Mordieu! yet it is annoying to give up."

"Yes; but it can be put off. I told your highness that the house is taken

for a year; we know the lady lodges on the first story. We have gained her maid, and have a key which opens the door: you may wait safely."

"You are sure that the door yielded?"

"Yes, at the third key I tried."

"Are you sure you shut it again?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

Aurilly did not feel sure, as he said, but he did not choose to admit it.

"Well, I will go; I shall return some other time." And the duke went away, promising to pay off the gentlemen for their interruption.

They had hardly disappeared, when the five companions saw approach a cavalier wrapped in a large cloak. The steps of his horse resounded on the frozen ground, and they went slowly and with precaution, for it was slippery.

"This time," said Quelus, "it is he."

"Impossible," said Maugiron.

"Why?"

"Because he is alone, and we left him with Livarot, Antragues, and Ribeirac, who would not have let him run such a risk."

"It is he, however; do you not recognize his insolent way of carrying his head?"

"Then," said D'O, "it is a snare."

"In any case, it is he; and so, to arms!"

It was, indeed, Bussy, who came carelessly down the Rue St. Antoine, and followed the route given him by Quelus; he had, as we have seen, received the warning of St. Luc, and, in spite of it, had parted from his friends at the Hotel Montmorency. It was one of those bravadoes delighted in by the valiant colonel, who said of himself, "I am but a simple gentleman, but I bear in my breast the heart of an emperor; and when I read in Plutarch the exploits of the ancient Romans, I think there is not one that I could not imitate." And besides, he thought that St. Luc, who was not ordinarily one of his friends, merely wished to get him laughed at for his precautions; and Bussy feared ridicule more than danger.

He had, even in the eyes of his enemies, earned a reputation for courage, which could only be sustained by the rashest adventures. Therefore, alone, and armed only with a sword and poniard, he advanced toward the house where waited for him no person but simply a letter, which the queen of Navarre sent him every month on the same day, and which he, according to his promise to the beautiful Marguerite, went to fetch himself, alone, and at night.

When he arrived at the Rue St. Catherine, his active eye discerned in the shade the forms of his adversaries. He counted them: "Three, four, five," said he, "without counting the lackeys, who are doubtless within call. They think much of me, it seems; all these for one man. That brave St. Luc did not deceive me; and were his even the first sword to pierce me, I would cry, 'Thanks for your warning, friend.'" So saying, he continued to advance, only his arm held his sword under his cloak, of which he had unfastened the clasp.

It was then that Quelus cried, "To arms."

"Ah, gentlemen," said Bussy, "it appears you wish to kill me: I am the wild boar you had to hunt. Well, gentlemen, the wild boar will rip up a few of you; I swear it to you, and I never break my word."

"Possibly," said Schomberg; "but it is not right, M. Bussy d'Amboise, that you should be on horseback and we on foot." And as he spoke, the arm of the young man, covered with white satin, which glistened in the moonlight, came from under his cloak, and Bussy felt his horse give way under him. Schomberg had, with an address peculiar to himself, pierced the horse's leg with a kind of cutlass, of which the blade was heavier than the handle, and which had remained in the wound. The animal gave a shrill cry, and fell on his knees. Bussy, always ready, jumped at once to the ground, sword in hand.

"Ah!" cried he, "my favorite horse, you shall pay for this." And as Schomberg approached incautiously, Bussy gave him a blow which broke his thigh. Schomberg uttered a cry.

"Well!" said Bussy, "have I kept my word? one already. It was the wrist of Bussy, and not his horse's leg, you should have cut."

In an instant, while Schomberg bound up his thigh with his handkerchief, Bussy presented the point of his long sword to his four other assailants, disdaining to cry for help, but retreating gradually, not to fly, but to gain a wall, against which to support himself, and prevent his being attacked behind, making all the while constant thrusts, and feeling sometimes that soft resistance of the flesh which showed that his blows had taken effect. Once he slipped for an instant. That instant sufficed for Quelus to give him a wound in the side.

"Touched," cried Quelus.

"Yes, in the doublet," said Bussy, who would not even acknowledge his hurt. And rushing on Quelus, with a vigorous effort, he made his sword fly from his hand. But he could not pursue his advantage, for D'O, D'Epernon, and Maugiron attacked him with fresh fury. Schomberg had bound his wound, and Quelus picked up his sword. Bussy made a bound backward, and reached the wall. There he stopped, strong as Achilles, and smiling at the tempest of blows which rained around him. All at once he felt a cloud pass over his eyes. He had forgotten his wound, but these symptoms of fainting recalled it to him.

"Ah, you falter!" cried Quelus.

"Judge of it!" cried Bussy. And with the hilt of his sword he struck him on the temple. Quelus fell under the blow. Then furious—wild, he rushed forward, uttering a terrible cry. D'O and D'Epernon drew back, Maugiron was raising Quelus, when Bussy broke his sword with his foot, and wounded the right arm of D'Epernon. For a moment he was conqueror, but Quelus recovered himself, and four swords flashed again. Bussy felt himself lost. He gathered all his strength to retreat once more step by step. Already the perspiration was cold on his brow, and the ringing in his ears and the cloud over his eyes warned him that his strength was giving way. He sought for the wall with his left hand; to his astonishment, it yielded. It was a door not quite closed. Then he regained hope and strength for a last effort. For a second his blows were rapid and violent. Then he let himself glide inside the door, and pushed it to with a violent blow. It shut, and Bussy was saved. He heard the furious blows of his enemies on the door, their cries of rage, and wrathful imprecations. Then, the ground seemed to fail under his feet, and the walls to move. He made a few steps forward, and fell on the steps of a staircase. He knew no more, but seemed to descend into the silence and obscurity of the tomb.

CHAPTER III.

HOW IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH A DREAM FROM THE REALITY.

BUSSY had had time, before falling, to pass his handkerchief under his shirt, and to buckle the belt of his sword over it, so as to make a kind of bandage to the open wound whence the blood flowed, but he had already lost blood enough to make him faint. However, during his fainting fit, this is what Bussy saw, or thought he saw. He found himself in a room with furniture of carved wood, with a tapestry of figures, and a painted ceiling. These figures, in all possible attitudes, holding flowers, carrying arms, seemed to him to be stepping from the walls. Between the two windows a portrait of a lady was hung. He, fixed to his bed, lay regarding all this. All at once the lady of the portrait seemed to move, and an adorable creature, clothed in a long white robe, with fair hair falling over her shoulders, and with eyes black as jet, with long lashes, and with a skin under which he seemed to see the blood circulate, advanced toward the bed. This woman was so beautiful, that Bussy made a violent effort to rise and throw himself at her feet. But he seemed to be confined there by bonds like those which keep the dead body in the tomb, while the soul mounts to the skies. This forced him to look at the bed on which he was lying, and it seemed to him one of those magnificent

beds sculptured in the reign of Francis I., to which were suspended hangings of white damask, embroidered in gold.

At the sight of this woman, the people of the wall and ceiling ceased to occupy his attention; she was all to him, and he looked to see if she had left a vacancy in the frame. But suddenly she disappeared; an opaque body interposed itself between her and Bussy, moving slowly, and stretching its arms out as though it were playing blind man's buff. Bussy felt in such a passion at this, that, had he been able, he would certainly have attacked this importunate vision; but as he made a vain effort, the new-comer spoke:

"Well," said he, "have I arrived at last?"

"Yes, monsieur," said a voice, so sweet that it thrilled through Bussy, "and now you may take off your bandage."

Bussy made an effort to see if the sweet voice belonged to the lady of the portrait, but it was useless. He only saw the pleasant face of a young man, who had just, as he was told, taken off his bandage, and was looking curiously about him.

"To the devil with this man," thought Bussy, and he tried to speak, but fruitlessly.

"Ah, I understand now," said the young man, approaching the bed; "you are wounded, are you not, my dear sir? Well, we will try to cure you."

"Is the wound mortal?" asked the sweet voice again, with a sad accent, which brought tears into the eyes of Bussy.

"I do not know yet, I am going to see; meanwhile, he has fainted."

This was all Bussy heard, he seemed to feel a red-hot iron in his side, and then lost all consciousness. Afterward, it was impossible for Bussy to fix the duration of this insensibility.

When he woke, a cold wind blew over his face, and harsh voices sounded in his ears; he opened his eyes to see if it were the people of the tapestry speaking, and hoping to see the lady again, looked round him. But there was neither tapestry nor ceiling visible, and the portrait had also disappeared. He saw at his right only a man with a white apron spotted with blood; at his left, a monk, who was raising his head; and before him, an old woman mumbling her prayers. His wondering eyes next rested on a mass of stone before him, in which he recognized the Temple, and above that, the cold white sky, slightly tinted by the rising sun. He was in the street.

"Ah, thank you, good people," said he, "for the trouble you have taken in bringing me here. I wanted air, but you might have given it to me by opening the window, and I should have been better on my bed of white damask and gold than on the bare ground. But never mind, there is in my pocket, unless you have paid yourselves, which would have been prudent, some twenty golden crowns; take, my friends, take."

"But, my good gentleman," said the butcher, "we did not bring you here, but found you here as we passed."

"Ah, diable! and the young doctor, was he here?"

The bystanders looked at each other.

"It is the remains of delirium," said the monk. Then, turning to Bussy, "I think you would do well to confess," said he, "there was no doctor, poor young man; you were here alone, and as cold as death."

Bussy then remembered having received a sword stroke, glided his hand under his doublet, and felt his handkerchief in the same place, fixed over his wound by his sword-belt.

"It is singular," said he.

Already profiting by his permission, the lookers-on were dividing his purse.

"Now, my friends," said he, "will you take me to my hotel?"

"Ah, certainly," said the old woman, "poor dear young man, the butcher is strong, and then he has his horse, on which you can ride."

"Yes, my gentleman, my horse and I are at your service."

"Nevertheless, my son," said the monk, "I think you would do well to confe[illegible]

"What are you called?" asked Bu[illegible]

"Brother Gorenflot."

"Well, Brother Gorenflot, I trust my

hour has not yet arrived, and, as I am cold, I wish to get quickly home and warm myself."

"What is your hotel called?"

"Hotel de Bussy."

"How!" cried all, "you belong to M. de Bussy?"

"I am M. de Bussy himself."

"Bussy," cried the butcher, "the brave Bussy, the scourge of the minions!" And raising him, he was quickly carried home, while the monk went away, murmuring, "If it was that Bussy, I do not wonder he would not confess!"

When he got home, Bussy sent for his usual doctor, who found the wound not dangerous.

"Tell me," said Bussy, "has it not been already dressed?"

"Ma foi," said the doctor, "I am not sure."

"And was it serious enough to make me delirious?"

"Certainly."

"Ah!" thought Bussy, "was that tapestry, that frescoed ceiling, that bed, the portrait between the windows, the beautiful blonde woman with black eyes, the doctor blindfolded, was this all delirium? Is nothing true but my combat? Where did I fight? Ah, yes, I remember; near the Bastille, by the Rue St. Paul. I leaned against a door, and it opened; I shut it—and then I remember no more. Have I dreamed or not? And my horse! My horse must have been found dead on the place. Doctor, pray call some one."

The doctor called a valet. Bussy inquired, and heard that the animal, bleeding and mutilated, had dragged itself to the door of the hotel, and had been found there.

"It must have been a dream," thought he again: "how should a portrait come down from the wall and talk to a doctor with a bandage on his eyes? I am a fool; and yet when I remember, she was so charming," and he began to describe her beauties, till he cried out, "It is impossible it should have been a dream; and yet I found myself in the street, and a monk kneeling by me. Doctor," said he, "shall I have to keep the house a fortnight again for this scratch, as I did for the last?"

"We shall see; can you walk?"

"I seem to have quicksilver in my legs."

"Try."

Bussy jumped out of bed, and walked quickly round his room.

"That will do," said the doctor, "provided that you do not go on horseback, or walk ten miles the first day."

"Capital! you are a doctor; however, I have seen another to-night. Yes, I saw him, and if ever I meet him, I should know him."

"I advise you not to seek for him, monsieur; one has always a little fever after a sword wound; you should know that, who have had a dozen."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" cried Bussy, struck with a new idea, "did my dream begin outside the door instead of inside? Was there no more a staircase and a passage, than there was a bed with white and gold damask, and a portrait? Perhaps those wretches, thinking me dead, carried me to the Temple, to divert suspicion, should any one have seen them hiding. Certainly, it must be so, and I have dreamed the rest. Mon Dieu! if they have procured for me this dream which torments me so, I swear to make an end of them all."

"My dear seigneur," said the doctor, "if you wish to get well, you must not agitate yourself thus."

"Except St. Luc," continued Bussy, without attending; "he acted as a friend, and my first visit shall be to him."

"Not before five this evening."

"If you wish it; but, I assure you, it is not going out and seeing people which will make me ill, but staying quietly at home."

"Well, it is possible; you are always a singular patient; act as you please, only I recommend you not to get another wound before this one is healed."

Bussy promised to do his best to avoid it, and, after dressing, called for his litter to take him to the Hotel Montmorency.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MADAME DE ST. LUC HAD PASSED THE NIGHT.

LOUIS DE CLERMONT, commonly called Bussy d'Amboise, was a perfect gentleman, and a very handsome man. Kings and princes had sought for his friendship; queens and princesses had lavished on him their sweetest smiles. He had succeeded La Mole in the affections of Queen Maguerite, who had committed for him so many follies, that even her husband, insensible so long, was moved at them; and the Duke Francois would never have pardoned him, had it not gained over Bussy to his interests, and once again he sacrificed all to his ambition. But in the midst of all his successes of war, ambition, and intrigue, he had remained insensible; and he who had never known fear, had never either known love.

When the servants of M. de St. Luc saw Bussy enter, they ran to tell M. de Brissac.

"Is M. de St. Luc at home?" asked Bussy.——"No, monsieur."

"Where shall I find him?"

"I do not know, monsieur. We are all very anxious about him, for he has not returned since yesterday."

"Nonsense."

"It is true, monsieur."

"But Madame de St. Luc?"

"Oh, she is here."

"Tell her I shall be charmed if she will allow me to pay my respects to her."

Five minutes after the messenger returned, saying Madame de St. Luc would be glad to see M. de Bussy.

When Bussy entered the room, Jeanne ran to meet him. She was very pale, and her jet black hair made her look more so; her eyes were red from her sleepless night, and there were traces of tears on her cheeks.

"You are welcome, M. de Bussy," said she, "in spite of the fears your presence awakens."

"What do you mean, madame? how can I cause you fear?"

"Ah! there was a meeting last night between you and M. de St. Luc? confess it."

"Between me and St. Luc!"

"Yes, he sent me away to speak to you; you belong to the Duc d'Anjou, he to the king. You have quarreled—do not hide it from me. You must understand my anxiety. He went with the king, it is true—but afterward?"

"Madame, this is marvelous. I expected you to ask after my wound—"

"He wounded you; he did fight, then?"

"No, madame; not with me at least; it was not he who wounded me. Indeed, he did all he could to save me. Did he not tell you so?"

"How could he tell me? I have not seen him."

"You have not seen him? Then your porter spoke the truth."

"I have not seen him since eleven last night."

"But where can he be?"

"I should rather ask you."

"Oh, pardieu, tell me about it, it is very droll."

The poor woman looked at him with astonishment.

"No, it is very sad, I mean. I have lost much blood, and scarcely know what I am saying. Tell me this lamentable story, madame."

Jeanne told all she knew; how the king had carried him off, the shutting of the doors of the Louvre, and the message of the guards.

"Ah! very well, I understand," said Bussy.

"How! you understand."

"Yes; his majesty took him to the Louvre, and once there he could not come out again."

"And why not?"

"Ah! that is a state secret."

"But my father went to the Louvre, and I also, and the guards said they did not know what we meant."

"All the more reason that he should be there."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it, and if you wish to be so also—"

"How?"

"By seeing."

"Can I?"

"Certainly."

"But if I go there, they will send me away, as they did before."

"Would you like to go in?"

"But if he is not there?"

"I tell you he is there. Come; but they will not let in the wife of St. Luc."

"You laugh at me, and it is very cruel in my distress."

"No, dear lady, listen. You are young, you are tall, and have black eyes; you are like my youngest page, who looked so well in the cloth of gold yesterday."

"Ah! what folly, M. Bussy," cried Jeanne, blushing.

"I have no other method but this. If you wish to see St. Luc—"

"Oh! I would give all the world to see him."

"Well, I promise that you shall without giving anything."

"Oh, but—"——"I told you how."

"Well, I will do it; shall I send for the dress?"

"No, I will send you a new one I have at home; then you must join me this evening at the Rue St. Honoré, and we will go together to the Louvre." Jeanne began to laugh, and gave her hand to Bussy.

"Pardon my suspicions," said she.

"Willingly," and taking leave, he went home to prepare.

Bussy and Madame de St. Luc met at the appointed time; Jeanne looked beautiful in her disguise. At the end of the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois they met a large party, in which Bussy recognized the Duc d'Anjou and his train.

"Ah," said he, "we will make a triumphal entry into the Louvre."

"Eh! monseigneur," cried he to the duke.

The prince turned. "You, Bussy!" cried he, joyfully, "I heard you were badly wounded, and I was going to your hotel."

"Ma foi, monseigneur, if I am not dead, it is thanks to no one but myself. You get me into nice situations; that ball at St. Luc's was a regular snare, and they have nearly drained all the blood out of my body."

"They shall pay for it, Bussy; they shall pay dearly."

"Yes, you say so," said Bussy, with his usual liberty, "and you will smile on the first you meet."

"Well! accompany me to the Louvre, and you shall see."

"What shall I see, monseigneur?"

"How I will speak to my brother."

"You promise me reparation?"

"I promise you shall be content. You hesitate still, I believe."

"Monseigneur, I know you so well."

"Come, I tell you."

"This is good for you," whispered Bussy to Jeanne. "There will be a quarrel between the brothers, and meanwhile you can find St. Luc."

"Well," said he to the prince, "I follow you; if I am insulted, at least I can always revenge myself."

And he took his place near the duke, while his page kept close to him.

"Revenge yourself; no, Bussy," said the prince, "I charge myself with it. I know your assassins," added he, in a low tone.

"What! your highness has taken the trouble to inquire?"

"I saw them."

"How so?" cried Bussy, astonished.

"Oh! I had business myself at the Porte St. Antoine. They barely missed killing me in your place. Ah! I did not know it was you they were waiting for, or else—"——"Well?"

"Had you this new page with you?" asked the prince, without finishing his sentence.

"No, I was alone, and you?"

"I had Aurilly with me; and why were you alone?"

"Because I wish to preserve my name of the brave Bussy."

"And they wounded you?"

"I do not wish to give them the pleasure of knowing it, but I had a severe wound in the side."

"Ah! the wretches; Aurilly said he was sure they were bent on mischief."

"How! you saw the ambush, you were with Aurilly, who uses his sword as well as his lute, you thought they had bad in-

tentions, and you did not watch to give aid?"

"I did not know who they were waiting for."

"Mort diable! when you saw the king's friends, you might have known it was against some friends of yours. Now, as there is hardly any one but myself who has courage to be your friend, you might have guessed that it was I."

"Oh! perhaps you are right, my dear Bussy, but I did not think of all that."

When they entered, "Remember your promise," said Bussy, "I have some one to speak to."

"You leave me, Bussy?"

"Yes, I must, but if I hear a great noise I will come to you, so speak loud."

Then Bussy, followed by Jeanne, took a secret staircase, traversed two or three corridors, and arrived at an antechamber.

"Wait here for me," said he to Jeanne.

"Ah, mon Dieu! you leave me alone."

"I must, to provide for your entrance."

CHAPTER V.

HOW MADAME DE ST. LUC PASSED THE SECOND NIGHT OF HER MARRIAGE.

BUSSY went straight to the sleeping-room of the king. There were in it two beds of velvet and satin, pictures, relics, perfumed sachets from the East, and a collection of beautiful swords. Bussy knew the king was not there, as his brother had asked to see him, but he knew that there was next to it a little room which was occupied in turn by all the king's favorites, and which he now expected to find occupied by St. Luc, whom the king in his great affection had carried off from his wife. Bussy knocked at the antechamber common to the two rooms. The captain of the guards opened.

"M. de Bussy!" cried he.

"Yes, myself, dear M. de Nancey; the king wishes to speak to M. de St. Luc."

"Very well, tell M. de St. Luc the king wants him."

"What is he doing?"

"He is with Chicot, waiting for the king's return from his brother."

"Will you permit my page to wait here?"

"Willingly, monsieur."

"Enter, Jean," said Bussy, and he pointed to the embrasure of a window, where she went to hide herself. St. Luc entered, and M. de Nancey retired.

"What does the king want now?" cried St. Luc, angrily; "ah! it is you, M. de Bussy."

"I, and before everything, let me thank you for the service you rendered me."

"Ah! it was quite natural; I could not bear to see a brave gentleman assassinated: I thought you killed."

"It did not want much to do it, but I got off with a wound, which I think I repaid with interest to Schomberg and D'Epernon. As for Quelus, he may thank the bones of his head: they are the hardest I ever knew."

"Ah! tell me about it, it will amuse me a little."

"I have no time now, I come for something else. You are ennuyé—"

"To death."

"And a prisoner?"

"Completely. The king pretends no one can amuse him but me. He is very good, for since yesterday I have made more grimaces than his ape, and been more rude than his jester."

"Well, it is my turn to render you a service: can I do it?"

"Yes, go to the Marshal de Brissac's, and reassure my poor little wife, who must be very uneasy, and must think my conduct very strange."

"What shall I say to her?"

"Morbleu! tell her what you see; that I am a prisoner, and that the king talks to me of friendship like Cicero, who wrote on it; and of virtue like Socrates, who practiced it. It is in vain I tell him I am ungrateful for the first, and incredulous as to the last: he only repeats it over again."

"Is that all I can do for you?"

"Ah, mon Dieu! I fear so."

"Then it is done."

"How so?"

"I guessed all this, and told your wife so."

"And what did she say?"

"At first she would not believe; but I

trust now," continued he, glancing toward the window, "she will yield to evidence. Ask me something more difficult."

"Then, bring here the griffin of Signor Astolfo, and let me mount en croupe, and go to my wife."

"A more simple thing would be to take the griffin to your wife and bring her here."

"Here!"

"Yes, here."

"To the Louvre, that would be droll."

"I should think so. Then you would be ennuye no longer?"

"Ma foi! no; but if this goes on much longer, I believe I shall kill myself."

"Well! shall I give you my page?"

"To me?"

"Yes, he is a wonderful lad."

"Thank you, but I detest pages."

"Bah! try him."

"Bussy, you mock me."

"Let me leave him."

"No."

"I tell you, you will like him."

"No, no, a hundred times, no."

"Hola, page, come here."

Jeanne came forward, blushing.

"Oh!" cried St. Luc, recognizing her, in astonishment.

"Well! shall I send him away?"

"No, no. Ah, Bussy, I owe you an eternal friendship."

"Take care, you cannot be heard, but you can be seen."

"It is true," said St. Luc, retreating from his wife.

Indeed, M. de Nancey was beginning to wonder what was going on, when a great noise was heard from the gallery.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" cried M. de Nancey, "there is the king quarreling with some one."

"I really think so," replied Bussy, affecting inquietude; "can it be with the Duc d'Anjou, who came with me?"

The captain of the guard went off in the direction of the gallery.

"Have I not managed well?" said Bussy to St. Luc.

"What is it?"

"M. d'Anjou and the king are quarreling; I must go to them. You profit by the time to place in safety the page I have brought you; is it possible?"

"Oh, yes; luckily I declared I was ill and must keep my room."

"In that case, adieu, madame, and remember me in your prayers." And Bussy went off to the gallery, where the king, red with fury, swore to the duke, who was pale with anger, that in the scene of the preceding night Bussy was the aggressor.

"I affirm to you, sire," cried the duke, "that D'Epernon, Schomberg and Quelus were waiting for him at the Hotel des Tournelles."

"Who told you so?"

"I saw them with my own eyes."

"In that darkness! The night was pitch dark."

"I knew their voices."

"They spoke to you?"

"They did more, they took me for Bussy, and attacked me."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"And what were you doing there?"

"What does that matter to you?"

"I wish to know; I am curious today."

"I was going to Manasses."

"A Jew?"

"You go to Ruggieri, a poisoner."

"I go where I like: I am the king. Besides, as I said, Bussy was the aggressor."——"Where?"

"At St. Luc's ball."

"Bussy provoked five men? No, no, he is brave, but he is not mad."

"Par la mordieu! I tell you I heard him. Besides, he has wounded Schomberg in the thigh, D'Epernon in the arm, and half killed Quelus."

"Ah! really I did not know; I compliment him on it."

"I will make an example of this brawler."

"And I, whom your friends attack, in his person and in my own, will know if I am your brother, and if—"

At this moment Bussy, dressed in pale-green satin, entered the room.

"Sire!" said he, "receive my humble respects."

"Pardieu! here he is," cried Henri.

"Your majesty, it seems, was doing me the honor of speaking of me."

"Yes, and I am glad to see that, in spite of what they told me, your look shows good health."

"Sire, blood drawn improves the complexion, so mine ought to be good this morning."

"Well, since they have wounded you, complain, and I will do you justice."

"I complain of nothing, sire."

Henri looked astonished. "What did you say?" said he to the duke.

"I said that Bussy had received a wound in his side."

"Is it true, Bussy?"

"The first prince of the blood would not lie, sire."

"And yet you do not complain?"

"I shall never complain, sire, until they cut off my right hand, and prevent my revenging myself, and then I will try to do it with the left."

"Insolent," murmured Henri.

"Sire," said the duke, "do justice; we ask no better. Order an inquiry, name judges, and let it be proved who prepared the ambush and the intended murder."

Henri reddened. "No," said he, "I prefer this time to be ignorant where the wrong lies, and to pardon every one. I wish these enemies to make peace, and I am sorry that Schomberg and D'Epernon are kept at home by their wounds. Say, M. d'Anjou, which do you call the most forward to fight of all my friends, as you say you saw them?"

"Sire, it was Quelus."

"Ma foi! yes," said Quelus, "his highness is right."

"Then," said Henri, "let MM. Bussy and Quelus make peace in the name of all."

"Oh! oh!" said Quelus, "what does that mean, sire?"

"It means that you are to embrace here, before me."

Quelus frowned.

"Ah, signor," cried Bussy, imitating a pantaloon, "will you not do me this favor?"

Even the king laughed. Then, approaching Quelus, Bussy threw his arms round his neck, saying, "The king wishes it."

"I hope it engages us to nothing," whispered Quelus.

"Be easy," answered Bussy, "we will meet soon."

Quelus drew back in a rage, and Bussy, making a pirouette, went out of the gallery.

CHAPTER VI.

LE PETIT COUCHER OF HENRI III.

AFTER this scene, beginning in tragedy and ending in comedy, the king, still angry, went to his room, followed by Chicot, who asked for his supper.

"I am not hungry," said the king.

"It is possible, but I am."

The king did not seem to hear. He unclasped his cloak, took off his cap, and, advancing to the passage which led to St. Luc's room, said to Chicot, "Wait here for me till I return."

"Oh! do not be in a hurry," said Chicot. No sooner was the king gone, than Chicot opened the door and called, "Hola!"

A valet came. "The king has changed his mind," said Chicot, "he wishes a good supper here for himself and St. Luc, above all, plenty of wine, and dispatch."

The valet went to execute the orders, which he believed to be the king's. Henri meanwhile had passed into St. Luc's room. He found him in bed, having prayers read to him by an old servant who had followed him to the Louvre, and shared his captivity. In a corner, on an armchair, his head buried in his hands, slept the page.

"Who is that young man?" asked the king.

"Did not your majesty authorize me to send for a page."

"Yes, doubtless."

"Well, I have profited by it."

"Oh!"

"Does your majesty repent of having allowed me this little indulgence?"

"No, no, on the contrary, amuse yourself, my son. How are you?"

"Sire, I have a fever."

"Really, your face is red; let me feel your pulse, I am half a doctor."

St. Luc held out his hand with visible ill-humor.

"Oh!" said the king, "intermittent—agitated."

"Yes, sire, I am very ill."

"I will send you my doctor."

"Thank you, sire, but I hate Miron."

"I will watch you myself. You shall have a bed in my room, and we will talk all night."

"Oh!" cried St. Luc, "you see me ill, and you want to keep me from sleeping. That is a singular way to treat your patient, doctor."

"But you cannot be left alone, suffering as you are."

"Sire, I have my page, Jean."

"But he sleeps."

"That is what I like best, then he will not disturb me."

"Well, come and assist at my going to bed."

"Then I shall be free to come back to bed?"——"Perfectly."

"Well, so be it. But I shall make a bad courtier, I assure you; I am dying with sleep."

"You shall yawn at your ease."

"Sire, if your majesty will leave me, I will be with you in five minutes."

"Well, then, five minutes, but no longer."

As soon as the door was shut, the page jumped up. "Ah! St. Luc," cried she, "you are going to leave me again. Mon Dieu! I shall die of fright here, if they discover me."

"My dear Jeanne, Gaspard here will protect you."

"Had I not better go back?"

"If you really wish it, Jeanne," said St. Luc. sadly, "you shall. But if you are as good as you are beautiful, if you have any feeling in your heart for me, you will wait here a little. I shall suffer so much from my head and nerves, that the king will not long keep so sad a companion."

"Go, then," said Jeanne, "and I will wait."

"My dear Jeanne, you are adorable. Trust me to return as soon as possible. Besides, I have an idea, which I will tell you when I return."

"An idea which will restore your liberty?"

"I hope so."

"Then go."

"Gaspard," said St. Luc, "prevent any one from entering here, and in a quarter of an hour lock the door, and bring me the key to the king's room. Then go home, and tell them not to be uneasy about Madame la Comtesse, and come back to-morrow."

Then St. Luc kissed his wife's hand, and went to the king, who was already growing impatient. Jeanne, alone and trembling, hid behind the curtains of the bed. When St. Luc entered, he found the king amid a perfect carpet of flowers, of which the stalks had been cut off—roses, jasmine, violets, and wall-flowers, in spite of the severe weather, formed an odorous carpet for Henri III. The chamber, of which the roof was painted, had in it two beds, one of which was so large as to occupy a third of the room. It was hung with gold and silk tapestry, representing mythological figures, and the windows had curtains to match. From the center of the ceiling hung, suspended by a golden chain, a silver gilt lamp, in which burned a perfumed oil. At the side of the bed was a golden satyr, holding in his hand a candelabrum, containing four rose-color wax candles, also perfumed.

The king, with his naked feet resting on the flowers, was seated on a chair of ebony inlaid with gold; he had on his knees seven or eight young spaniels, who were licking his hands. Two servants were curling his hair, his mustachios, and beard, a third was covering his face with a kind of cream, which had a most delightful scent.

"Here," cried Chicot, "the grease and the combs, I will try them too."

"Chicot," said Henri, "your skin is too dry, and will use too much cream, and your beard is so hard, it will break my combs. Well, my son," said he, turning to St. Luc. "how is your head?"

St. Luc put his hand to his head and groaned.

"Imagine!" continued Henri, "I have seen Bussy d'Amboise."

"Bussy!" cried St. Luc, trembling.

"Yes, those fools! five of them attacked him, and let him escape. If you had been there, St. Luc—"

"I should probably have been like the others."

"Oh! no, I wager you are as good as Bussy. We will try to-morrow."

"Sire, I am too ill for anything."

Henri, hearing a singular noise, turned round, and saw Chicot eating up all the supper that had been brought for two.

"What the devil are you doing, M. Chicot?" cried Henri.

"Taking my cream internally, since you will not allow me to do it outwardly."

"Go and fetch my captain of the guards," said Henri.

"What for?" asked Chicot, emptying a porcelain cup of chocolate.

"To pass his sword through your body."

"Ah! let him come, we shall see!" cried Chicot, putting himself in such a comical attitude of defense that every one laughed.

"But I am hungry," cried the king; "and the wretch has eaten up all the supper."

"You are capricious, Henri; I offered you supper, and you refused. However, your bouillon is left; I am no longer hungry, and I am going to bed."

"And I also," said St. Luc, "for I can stand no longer."

"Stay, St. Luc," said the king, "take these," and he offered him a handful of little dogs.

"What for?"

"To sleep with you; they will take your illness from you."

"Thanks, sire," said St. Luc, putting them back in their basket, "but I have no confidence in your receipt."

"I will come and visit you in the night, St. Luc."

"Pray do not, sire, you will only disturb me," and saluting the king, he went away. Chicot had already disappeared, and there only remained with the king the valets, who covered his face with a mask of fine cloth, plastered with the perfumed cream, in which were holes for the eyes, nose, and mouth; a cap of silk and silver fixed it on the forehead and ears. They next covered his arms with sleeves made of wadded silk, and then presented him with kid gloves, also greased inside.

These mysteries of the royal toilet finished, they presented to him his soup in a golden cup. Then Henri said a prayer, a short one that night, and went to bed.

When settled there, he ordered them to carry away the flowers, which were beginning to make the air sickly, and to open the window for a moment. Then the valet closed the doors and curtains, and called in Narcissus, the king's favorite dog, who, jumping on the bed, settled himself at once on the king's feet. The valet next put out the wax lights, lowered the lamp, and went out softly.

Already, more tranquil and nonchalant than the lazy monks of his kingdom in their fat abbeys, the king of France no longer remembered that there was a France.—He slept.

Every noise was hushed, and one might have heard a bat fly in the somber corridors of the Louvre.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW, WITHOUT ANY ONE KNOWING WHY, THE KING WAS CONVERTED BEFORE THE NEXT DAY.

THREE hours passed thus.

Suddenly, a terrible cry was heard, which came from the king's room.

All the lights in his room were out, and no sound was to be heard except this strange call of the king's. For it was he who had cried.

Soon was heard the noise of furniture falling, porcelain breaking, steps running about the room, and the barking of dogs—mingled with new cries. Almost instantly lights burned, swords shone in the galleries, and the heavy steps of the guards were heard.

"To arms!" cried all, "the king calls."

And the captain of the guards, the colonel of the Swiss, and some attendants, rushed into the king's room with flambeaux.

Near an overturned chair, broken cups, and disordered bed, stood Henri, looking terrified and grotesque in his night-dress.

His right hand was extended, trembling like a leaf in the wind, and his left held his sword, which he had seized mechanically.

He appeared dumb through terror, and all the spectators, not daring to break the silence, waited with the utmost anxiety. Then appeared, half dressed and wrapped in a large cloak, the young queen, Louise de Lorraine, blonde and gentle, who led the life of a saint upon earth, and who had been awakened by her husband's cries.

"Sire," cried she, also trembling, "what is the matter? Mon Dieu! I heard your cries, and I came."

"It — it is nothing," said the king, without moving his eyes, which seemed to be looking in the air for some form invisible to all but him.

"But your majesty cried out; is your majesty suffering?" asked the queen.

Terror was so visibly painted on the king's countenance, that it began to gain on the others.

"Oh, sire!" cried the queen again, "in Heaven's name do not leave us in this suspense. Will you have a doctor?"

"A doctor, no," cried Henri, in the same tone, "the body is not ill, it is the mind; no doctor—a confessor."

Every one looked round; nowhere was there to be seen any traces of what had so terrified the king. However, a confessor was sent for; Joseph Foulon, superior of the convent of St. Genevieve, was torn from his bed, to come to the king. With the confessor, the tumult ceased, and silence was re-established; every one conjectured and wondered—the king was confessing.

The next day the king rose early, and began to read prayers, then he ordered all his friends to be sent for. They sent to St. Luc, but he was more suffering than ever. His sleep, or rather his lethargy, had been so profound, that he alone had heard nothing of the tumult in the night, although he slept so near. He begged to be left in bed. At this deplorable recital, Henri crossed himself, and sent him a doctor.

Then he ordered that all the scourges from the convents should be brought to him, and, going to his friends, distributed them, ordering them to scourge each other as hard as they could.

D'Epernon said that as his right arm was in a sling, and he could not return the blows he received, he ought to be exempt, but the king replied that that would only make it the more acceptable to God.

He himself set the example. He took off his doublet, waistcoat, and shirt, and struck himself like a martyr. Chicot tried to laugh, as usual, but was warned by a terrible look, that this was not the right time, and he was forced to take a scourge like the others.

All at once the king left the room, telling them to wait for him. Immediately the blows ceased, only Chicot continued to strike D'O, whom he hated, and D'O returned it as well as he could. It was a duel with whips.

The king went to the queen, gave her a pearl necklace worth 25,000 crowns, and kissed her, which he had not done for a year. Then he asked her to put off her royal ornaments and put on a sack.

Louise, always good, consented, but asked why her husband gave her a necklace, and yet made such a request.

"For my sins," replied he.

The queen said no more, for she knew, better than any one, how many he had to repent of.

Henri returned, which was a signal for the flagellation to recommence. In ten minutes the queen arrived, with her sack on her shoulders. Then tapers were distributed to all the court, and barefooted, through the snow, all the courtiers and fine ladies went to Montmartre, shivering. At five o'clock the promenade was over, the convents had received rich presents, the feet of all the court were swollen, and the backs of the courtiers sore. There had been tears, cries, prayers, incense, and psalms. Every one had suffered, without knowing why the king, who danced the night before, scourged himself to-day. As for Chicot, he had escaped at the Porte Montmartre, and, with Brother Gorenflot, had entered a

public-house, where he had eaten and drank. Then he had rejoined the procession and returned to the Louvre.

In the evening the king, fatigued with his fast and his exercise, ordered himself a light supper, had his shoulders washed, and then went to visit St. Luc.

"Ah!" cried he, "God has done well to render life so bitter."

"Why so, sire?"

"Because then man, instead of fearing death, longs for it."

"Speak for yourself, sire, I do not long for it at all."

"Listen, St. Luc, will you follow my example?"

"If I think it a good one."

"I will leave my throne, you your wife, and we will enter a cloister. I will call myself Brother Henri—"

"Pardon, sire, if you do not care for your crown, of which you are tired, I care very much for my wife, whom I know so little. Therefore I refuse."

"Oh! you are better."

"Infinitely better, sire; I feel quite joyous, and disposed for happiness and pleasure."

"Poor St. Luc!" cried the king, clasping his hands.

"You should have asked me yesterday, sire, then I was ill and cross. I would have thrown myself into a well for a trifle. But this evening it is quite a different thing. I have passed a good night and a charming day. Mordieu, vive la joie!"

"You swear, St. Luc."

"Did I, sire? but I think you swear sometimes."

"I have sworn, St. Luc, but I shall swear no more."

"I cannot say that; I will not swear more than I can help, and God is merciful."

"You think He will pardon me?"

"Oh! I speak for myself, not for you, sire. You have sinned as a king, I as a private man, and we shall, I trust, be differently judged."

The king sighed. "St. Luc," said he, "will you pass the night in my room?"

"Why, what should we do?"

"We will light all the lamps, I will go to bed, and you shall read prayers to me."

"No, thank you, sire."

"You will not?"

"On no account."

"You abandon me, St. Luc!"

"No, I will stay with your majesty, if you will send for music and ladies, and have a dance."

"Oh, St. Luc, St. Luc!"

"I am wild to-night, sire, I want to dance and drink."

"St. Luc," said the king, solemnly, "do you ever dream?"

"Often, sire."

"You believe in dreams?"

"With reason."

"How so?"

"Dreams console for the reality. Last night I had a charming dream."

"What was it?"

"I dreamed that my wife—"

"You still think of your wife?"

"More than ever, sire; well, I dreamed that she, with her charming face—for she is pretty, sire—"

"So was Eve, who ruined us all."

"Well, my wife had procured wings and the form of a bird, and so, braving locks and bolts, she passed over the walls of the Louvre, and came to my window, crying, 'Open, St. Luc, open, my husband.'"

"And you opened?"

"I should think so."

"Worldly."

"As you please, sire."

"Then you woke?"

"No, indeed, the dream was too charming; and I hope to-night to dream again; therefore I refuse your majesty's obliging offer. If I sit up, let me at least have something to pay me for losing my dream. If your majesty will do as I said—"

"Enough, St. Luc. I trust Heaven will send you a dream to-night which will lead you to repentance."

"I doubt it, sire, and I advise you to send away this libertine St. Luc, who is resolved not to amend."

"No, no, I hope, before to-morrow, grace will have touched you as it has me. Good-night, I will pray for you."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE KING WAS AFRAID OF BEING AFRAID.

WHEN the king left St. Luc, he found the court, according to his orders, in the great gallery. Then he gave D'O, D'Epernon and Schomberg an order to retire into the provinces, threatened Quelus and Maugiron to punish them if they quarreled any more with Bussy, to whom he gave his hand to kiss, and then embraced his brother Francois.

As for the queen, he was prodigal in politeness to her.

When the usual time for retiring approached, the king seemed trying to retard it. At last ten o'clock struck.

"Come with me, Chicot," then said he, "good-night, gentlemen."

"Good-night, gentlemen," said Chicot, "we are going to bed. I want my barber, my hairdresser, my valet-de-chambre, and, above all, my cream."

"No," said the king, "I want none of them to-night; Lent is going to begin."

"I regret the cream," said Chicot.

The king and Chicot entered the room, which we already know.

"Ah ca! Henri," said Chicot, "I am the favorite to-night. Am I handsomer than that Cupid, Quelus?"

"Silence, Chicot, and you, gentlemen of the toilet, go out."

They obeyed, and the king and Chicot were left alone.

"Why do you send them away?" asked Chicot, "they have not greased us yet. Are you going to grease me with your own royal hand? It would be an act of humility."

"Let us pray," said Henri.

"Thank you, that is not amusing. If that be what you called me for, I prefer to return to the bad company I have left. Adieu, my son. Good-night."

"Stay," said the king.

"Oh! this is tyranny. You are a despot, a Phalaris, a Dionysius. All day you have made me tear the shoulders of my friends with cow-hide, and now we are to begin again. Do not let us do it, Henri, when there's but two, every blow tells."

"Hold your tongue, miserable chatterer, and think of repentance."

"I repent! And of what? Of being jester to a monk. *Confiteor*—I repent, *mea culpa*, it is a great sin."

"No sacrilege, wretch."

"Ah! I would rather be shut up in a cage with lions and apes, than with a mad king. Adieu, I am going."

The king locked the door.

"Henri, you look sinister; if you do not let me go, I will cry, I will call, I will break the window, I will kick down the door."

"Chicot," said the king, in a melancholy tone, "you abuse my sadness."

"Ah! I understand, you are afraid to be alone. Tyrants always are so. Take my long sword, and let me take the scabbard to my room."

At the word "afraid," Henri shuddered, and he looked nervously around, and seemed so agitated and grew so pale that Chicot began to think him really ill, and said—

"Come, my son, what is the matter, tell your troubles to your friend Chicot."

The king looked at him, and said:

"Yes, you are my friend, my only friend."

"There is," said Chicot, "the abbey of Valency vacant."

"Listen, Chicot, you are discreet."

"There is also that of Pithiviers, where they make such good pies."

"In spite of your buffooneries, you are a brave man."

"Then do not give me an abbey, give me a regiment."

"And even a wise one."

"Then do not give me a regiment, make me a counselor; but no, when I think of it, I should prefer a regiment, for I should be always forced to be of the king's opinion."

"Hold your tongue, Chicot, the terrible hour approaches."

"Ah! you are beginning again."

"You will hear."

"Hear what?"

"Wait, and the event will show you. Chicot, you are brave!"

"I boast of it, but I do not wish to try. Call your captain of the guards, your Swiss, and let me go away from this invisible danger."

"Chicot, I command you to stay."

"On my word, a nice master. I am afraid, I tell you. Help!"

"Well, drôle, if I must, I will tell you all."

"Ah!" cried Chicot, drawing his sword, "once warned, I do not care; tell, my son, tell. Is it a crocodile? my sword is sharp, for I use it every week to cut my corns." And Chicot sat down in the armchair with his drawn sword between his legs.

"Last night," said Henri, "I slept—"

"And I also," said Chicot.

"Suddenly a breath swept over my face."

"It was the dog, who was hungry, and who licked your cream."

"I half woke, and felt my beard bristle with terror under my mask."

"Ah! you make me tremble deliciously."

"Then," continued the king, in a trembling voice, "then a voice sounded through the room, with a doleful vibration."

"The voice of the crocodile! I have read in Marco Polo, that the crocodile has a voice like the crying of children; but be easy, my son, for if it comes, we will kill it."

"'Listen! miserable sinner,' said the voice—"

"Oh! it spoke; then it was not a crocodile."

"'Miserable sinner,' said the voice, 'I am the angel of God.'"

"The angel of God!"

"Ah! Chicot, it was a frightful voice."

"Was it like the sound of a trumpet?"

"'Are you there?' continued the voice, 'do you hear, hardened sinner; are you determined to persevere in your iniquities?'"

"Ah, really; he said very much the same as other people, it seems to me."

"Then, Chicot, followed many other reproaches, which I assure you were most painful."

"But tell me what he said, that I may see if he was well informed?"

"Impious! do you doubt?"

"I? all that astonishes me is, that he waited so long to reproach you. So, my son, you were dreadfully afraid?"

"Oh, yes, the marrow seemed to dry in my bones."

"It is quite natural; on my word, I do not know what I should have done in your place. And then you called?"

"Yes."

"And they came?"

"Yes."

"And there was no one here?"

"No one."

"It is frightful."

"So frightful, that I sent for my confessor."

"And he came?"

"Immediately."

"Now, be frank, my son; tell the truth for once. What did he think of your revelation?"

"He shuddered."

"I should think so."

"He ordered me to repent, as the voice told me."

"Very well. There can be no harm in repenting. But what did he think of the vision?"

"That it was a miracle, and that I must think of it seriously. Therefore, this morning—"

"What have you done?"

"I gave 100,000 livres to the Jesuits."

"Very well."

"And scourged myself and friends."

"Perfect! but after?"

"Well, what do you think of it, Chicot? It is not to the jester I speak, but to the man of sense, to my friend."

"Ah, sire, I think your majesty had the nightmare."

"You think so?"

"Yes, it was a dream, which will not be renewed, unless your majesty thinks too much about it."

"A dream? No, Chicot, I was awake, my eyes were open."

"I sleep like that."

"Yes, but then you do not see, and I saw the moon shining through my windows, and its light on the amethyst in the hilt of my sword, which lay in that chair where you are."

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DUMAS, Volume Five.—*Page 262.*

"And the lamp?"

"Had gone out."

"A dream, my son."

"Why do you not believe, Chicot? It is said that God speaks to kings, when He wishes to effect some change on the earth."

"Yes, He speaks, but so low that they never hear Him."

"Well, do you know why I made you stay?—that you might hear as well as I."

"No one would believe me if I said I heard it."

"My friend, it is a secret which I confide to your known fidelity."

"Well, I accept. Perhaps it will also speak to me."

"Well, what must I do?"

"Go to bed, my son."

"But—"

"Do you think that sitting up will keep it away?"

"Well, then, you remain."

"I said so."

"Well, then, I will go to bed."

"Good."

"But you will not?"

"Certainly not, I will stay here."

"You will not go to sleep?"

"Oh! that I cannot promise; sleep is like fear, my son, a thing independent of will."

"You will try, at least?"

"Be easy; I will pinch myself. Besides, the voice would wake me."

"Do not joke about the voice."

"Well, well, go to bed."

The king sighed, looked round anxiously, and glided tremblingly into bed. Then Chicot established him in his chair, arranging round him the pillows and cushions.

"How do you feel, sire?" said he.

"Pretty well; and you?"

"Very well; good-night, Henri."

"Good-night, Chicot; do not go to sleep."

"Of course not," said Chicot, yawning fit to break his jaws.

And they both closed their eyes, the king to pretend to sleep, Chicot to sleep really.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE ANGEL MADE A MISTAKE AND SPOKE TO CHICOT, THINKING IT WAS THE KING.

THE king and Chicot remained thus for some time. All at once the king jumped up in his bed. Chicot woke at the noise.

"What is it?" asked he, in a low voice.

"The breath on my face."

As he spoke, one of the wax lights went out, then the other, and the rest followed. Then the lamp also went out, and the room was lighted only by the rays of the moon. At the same moment they heard a hollow voice, saying, apparently from the end of the room—

"Hardened sinner, art thou there?"

"Yes," said Henri, with chattering teeth.

"Oh!" thought Chicot, "that is a very hoarse voice to come from heaven; nevertheless, it is dreadful."

"Do you hear?" asked the voice.

"Yes, and I am bowed down to the earth."

"Do you believe you obeyed me by all the exterior mummeries which you performed yesterday, without your heart being touched?"

"Very well said," thought Chicot. He approached the king softly.

"Do you believe now?" asked the king, with clasped hands.

"Wait."

"What for?"

"Hush! leave your bed quietly, and let me get in."

"Why?"

"That the anger of the Lord may fall first on me."

"Do you think that He will spare me for that?"

"Let us try," and he pushed the king gently out and got into his place.

"Now, go to my chair, and leave all to me."

Henri obeyed; he began to understand.

"You do not reply," said the voice; "you are hardened in sin."

"Oh! pardon! pardon!" cried Chicot, imitating the king's voice. Then he whispered to Henri, "It is droll that the angel does not know me."

"What can it mean?"

"Wait."

"Wretch!" said the voice.

"Yes, I confess," said Chicot; "I am a hardened sinner, a dreadful sinner."

"Then acknowledge your crimes, and repent."

"I acknowledge to have been a great traitor to my cousin Conde, whose wife I seduced."

"Oh! hush," said the king, "that is so long ago."

"I acknowledge," continued Chicot, "to have been a great rogue to the Poles, who chose me for king, and whom I abandoned one night, carrying away the crown jewels. I repent of this."

"Ah!" whispered Henri again: "that is all forgotten."

"Hush! let me speak."

"Go on," said the voice.

"I acknowledge having stolen the crown from my brother, D'Alencon, to whom it belonged of right, as I had formerly renounced it on accepting the crown of Poland."

"Knave!" said the king.

"Go on," said the voice.

"I acknowledge having joined my mother, to chase from France my brother-in-law, the king of Navarre, after having destroyed all his friends."

"Ah!" whispered the king, angrily.

"Sire, do not let us offend God by trying to hide what He knows as well as we do."

"Leave politics," said the voice.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, with a doleful voice, "is it my private life I am to speak of?"

"Yes."

"I acknowledge, then, that I am effeminate, idle, and hypocritical."

"It is true."

"I have ill-treated my wife—such a worthy woman."

"One ought to love one's wife as one's self, and prefer her to all things," said the voice, angrily.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, "then I have sinned deeply."

"And you have made others sin by your example."

"It is true."

"Especially that poor St. Luc; and if you do not send him home to-morrow to his wife, there will be no pardon for you."

"Ah!" said Chicot to the king, "the voice seems to be friendly to the house of Cosse."

"And you must make him a duke, to recompense him for his forced stay."

"Peste!" said Chicot; "the angel is much interested for M. de St. Luc."

"Oh!" cried the king, without listening, "this voice from on high will kill me."

"Voice from the side, you mean," said Chicot.

"How! voice from the side?"

"Yes; can you not hear that the voice comes from that wall, Henri?—the angel lodges in the Louvre."

"Blasphemer!"

"Why, it is honorable for you; but you do not seem to recognize it. Go and visit him; he is only separated from you by that partition."

A ray of the moon falling on Chicot's face, showed it to the king so laughing and amused, that he said, "What! you dare to laugh?"

"Yes, and so will you in a minute. Be reasonable, and do as I tell you. Go and see if the angel be not in the next room."

"But if he speak again?"

"Well, I am here to answer. He is vastly credulous. For the last quarter of an hour I have been talking, and he has not recognized me. It is not clever!"

Henri frowned. "I begin to believe you are right, Chicot," said he.

"Go, then."

Henri opened softly the door which led into the corridor. He had scarcely entered it, when he heard the voice redoubling its reproaches, and Chicot replying.

"Yes," said the voice, "you are as inconstant as a woman, as soft as a Sybarite, as irreligious as a heathen."

"Oh!" whined Chicot, "is it my fault if I have such a soft skin—such white hands—such a changeable mind? But from to-day I will alter—I will wear coarse linen—"

However, as Henri advanced, he found

that Chicot's voice grew fainter, and the other louder, and that it seemed to come from St. Luc's room, in which he could see a light. He stooped down and peeped through the keyhole, and immediately grew pale with anger.

"Par la mordieu!" murmured he, "is it possible that they have dared to play such a trick?"

This is what he saw through the keyhole. St. Luc, in a dressing gown, was roaring through a tube the words which he had found so dreadful, and beside him, leaning on his shoulder, was a lady in white, who every now and then took the tube from him, and called through something herself, while stifled bursts of laughter accompanied each sentence of Chicot's, who continued to answer in a doleful tone.

"Jeanne de Cosse in St. Luc's room! A hole in the wall! such a trick on me! Oh! they shall pay dearly for it!" And with a vigorous kick he burst open the door.

Jeanne rushed behind the curtains to hide herself, while St. Luc, his face full of terror, fell on his knees before the king, who was pale with rage.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, from the bed, "Ah! mercy!—Holy Virgin! I am dying!"

Henri, seizing, in a transport of rage, the trumpet from the hands of St. Luc, raised it as if to strike. But St. Luc jumped up and cried—

"Sire, I am a gentleman; you have no right to strike me!"

Henri dashed the trumpet violently on the ground. Some one picked it up; it was Chicot, who, hearing the noise, judged that his presence was necessary as a mediator. He ran to the curtain, and, drawing out poor Jeanne, all trembling—

"Oh! said he, "Adam and Eve after the Fall. You send them away, Henri, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Then I will be the exterminating angel."

And throwing himself between the king and St. Luc, and waving the trumpet over the heads of the guilty couple, said—

"This is my Paradise, which you have lost by your disobedience; I forbid you to return to it."

Then he whispered to St. Luc, who had his arm round his wife—

"If you have a good horse, kill it, but be twenty leagues from here before to-morrow"

CHAPTER X.

HOW BUSSY WENT TO SEEK FOR THE REALITY OF HIS DREAM.

WHEN Bussy returned home again, he was still thinking of his dream.

"Morbleu!" said he, "it is impossible that a dream should have left such a vivid impression on my mind. I see it all so clearly;—the bed, the lady, the doctor. I must seek for it—surely I can find it again." Then Bussy, after having the bandage of his wound resettled by a valet, put on high boots, took his sword, wrapped himself in his cloak, and set off for the same place where he had been nearly murdered the night before, and nearly at the same hour.

He went in a litter to the Rue Roi-de-Sicile, then got out, and told his servants to wait for him. It was about nine in the evening, the curfew had sounded, and Paris was deserted. Bussy arrived at the Bastille, then he sought for the place where his horse had fallen, and thought he had found it; he next endeavored to repeat his movements of the night before, retreated to the wall, and examined every door to find the corner against which he had leaned, but all the doors seemed alike.

"Pardieu!" said he, "if I were to knock at each of these doors, question all the lodgers, spend 1,000 crowns to make valets and old women speak, I might learn what I want to know. There are fifty houses; it would take me at least five nights."

As he spoke, he perceived a small and trembling light approaching.

This light advanced slowly, and irregularly, stopping occasionally, moving on again, and going first to the right, then to the left, then, for a minute, coming straight on, and again diverging. Bussy leaned against a door, and waited. The light continued to advance, and soon he

could see a black figure, which, as it advanced, took the form of a man, holding a lantern in his left hand. He appeared to Bussy to belong to the honorable fraternity of drunkards, for nothing else seemed to explain the eccentric movements of the lantern. At last he slipped over a piece of ice, and fell. Bussy was about to come forward and offer his assistance, but the man and the lantern were quickly up again, and advanced directly toward him, when he saw, to his great surprise, that the man had a bandage over his eyes.

"Well!" thought he, "it is a strange thing to play at blind man's buff with a lantern in your hand. Am I beginning to dream again? And, good heavens! he is talking to himself. If he be not drunk or mad, he is a mathematician."

This last surmise was suggested by the words that Bussy heard.

"488, 489, 490," murmured the man, "it must be near here." And then he raised his bandage, and finding himself in front of a house, examined it attentively.

"No, it is not this," he said. Then, putting back his bandage, he recommenced his walk and his calculations.

"491, 492, 493, 494; I must be close." And he raised his bandage again, and, approaching the door next to that against which Bussy was standing, began again to examine.

"Hum!" said he, "it might, but all these doors are so alike."

"The same reflection I have just made," thought Bussy.

However, the mathematician no wadvanced to the next door, and going up to it, found himself face to face with Bussy.

"Oh!" cried he, stepping back.

"Oh!" cried Bussy.

"It is not possible."

"Yes; but it is extraordinary. You are the doctor?"

"And you the gentleman?"

"Just so."

"Mon Dieu! how strange."

"The doctor," continued Bussy, "who yesterday dressed a wound for a gentleman?"

"Yes, in the right side."

"Exactly so. You had a gentle, light, and skillful hand."

"Ah, sir, I did not expect to find you here."

"But what were you looking for?"

"The house."

"Then you do not know it?"

"How should I? they brought me here with my eyes bandaged."

"Then you really came here?"

"Either to this house or the next."

"Then I did not dream?"

"Dream?"

"I confess I feared it was all a dream."

"Ah! I fancied there was some mystery."

"A mystery which you must help me to unravel."

"Willingly."

"What is your name?"

"Monsieur, to such a question I ought, perhaps, to reply by looking fierce, and saying, 'Yours, monsieur, if you please; but you have a long sword, and I only a lancet; you seem to me a gentleman, and I cannot appear so to you, for I am wet and dirty. Therefore, I reply frankly: I am called Remy-le-Haudouin."

"Very well, monsieur; I thank you. I am Louis de Clermont, comte de Bussy."

"Bussy d'Amboise! the hero Bussy!" cried the young doctor, joyfully. "What, monsieur, you are that famous Bussy—?"

"I am Bussy," replied he. "And now, wet and dirty as you are, will you satisfy my curiosity?"

"The fact is," said the young man, "that I shall be obliged, like Epaminondas the Theban, to stay two days at home, for I have but one doublet and trousers. But, pardon, you did me the honor to question me, I think?"

"Yes, monsieur, I asked you how you came to this house?"

"M. le Comte, this is how it happened; I lodge in the Rue Beauheillis, 502 steps from here. I am a poor surgeon, not unskillful, I hope."

"I can answer for that."

"And who has studied much, but without any patients. Seven or eight days ago, a man having received behind the

Arsenal a stab with a knife, I sewed up the wound, and cured him. This made for me some reputation in the neighborhood, to which I attribute the happiness of having been last night awoke by a pretty voice."

"A woman's?"

"Yes, but, rustic as I am, I knew it to be the voice of a servant. I know them well."

"And what did you do?"

"I rose and opened my door, but scarcely had I done so, when two little hands, not very soft, but not very hard, put a bandage over my eyes, without saying anything.

"'Oh!' she said, 'come, do not try to see where you are going, be discreet, here is your recompense;' and she placed in my hand a purse."

"Ah! and what did you say?"

"That I was ready to follow my charming conductress. I did not know if she were charming or not, but I thought that the epithet, even if exaggerated, could do no harm."

"And you asked no more?"

"I had often read these kinds of histories in books, and I had remarked that they always turned out well for the doctor. Therefore I followed, and I counted 498 paces."

"Good; then this must be the door."

"It cannot be far off, at all events, unless she led me by some detour, which I half suspect."

"But did she pronounce no name?"

"None."

"But you remarked something?"

"All that one could with one's fingers, a door with nails, then a passage, and then a staircase—"

"On the left?"

"Yes; and I counted the steps. Then I think we came to a corridor, for they opened three doors."

"Well?"

"Then I heard another voice, and that belonged to the mistress, I am sure; it was sweet and gentle."

"Yes, yes, it was hers."

"Good, it was hers."

"I am sure of it."

"Then they pushed me into the room where you were, and told me to take off my bandage, when I saw you—"

"Where was I?"

"On a bed."

"A bed of white and gold damask?"

"Yes."

"In a room hung with tapestry?"

"Just so."

"And a painted ceiling?"

"Yes, and between two windows—"

"A portrait?"

"Yes."

"Representing a woman about nineteen?"

"Yes."

"Blonde, and beautiful as an angel?"

"More beautiful."

"Bravo! what did you do then?"

"I dressed your wound."

"And, ma foi! very well."

"As well as I could."

"Admirably! this morning it was nearly well."

"It is thanks to a balm I have composed, and which appears to me sovereign, for many times, not knowing who to practice upon, I have made wounds on myself, and they were always well in two or three days."

"My dear M. Remy, you are a charming doctor. Well, afterward?"

"You fainted again. The voice asked me how you were."

"From whence?"

"From a room at the side."

"So you did not see her?"

"No."——"And you replied?"

"That the wound was not dangerous, and in twenty-four hours would be well."

"She seemed pleased?"

"Charmed; for she cried, 'I am very glad of that.'"

"My dear M. Remy, I will make your fortune. Well?"

"That was all; I had no more to do; and the voice said, 'M. Remy—'"

"She knew your name?"

"Yes; 'M. Remy,' said she, 'be a man of honor to the last; do not compromise a poor woman carried away by an excess of humanity. Take your bandage, and let them take you straight home.'"

"You promised?"

"I gave my word."

"And you kept it?"

"As you see, for I am seeking now."

"You are an honest man, and here is my hand," cried Bussy.

"Monsieur, it will be an eternal glory for me to have touched the hand of Bussy d'Amboise. However, I have a scruple. There were ten pistoles in the purse."

"Well?"

"It is too much for a man who charges five sous for his visits, when he does not give them gratis, and I was seeking the house—"

"To return the purse?"

"Just so."

"My dear M. Remy, it is too much delicacy; you have earned the money well, and may surely keep it."

"You think so?" said Remy, well pleased.

"But I also am in your debt; indeed, it was I who ought to have paid you, and not the lady. Come, give me your confidence. What do you do in Paris?"

"What do I do? I do nothing; but I would if I had a connection."

"Well, that is just right; I will give you a patient. Will you have me? I am famous practice; for there is scarcely a day when I do not deface God's noblest work for others, or they for me. Will you undertake the care of all the holes I make in the skin of others, or others in mine?"

"Ah, M. le Comte! this honor."

"No; you are just the man I want. You shall come and live with me; you shall have your own rooms, and your own servants; accept, or you will really annoy me."

"M. le Comte, I am so overjoyed, I cannot express it. I will work—I will make a connection—"

"But, no, I tell you, I keep you for myself and my friends. Now, do you remember anything more?"

"Nothing."

"Ah, well! help me to find out, if it be possible."——"I will."

"And you, who are a man of observation, how do you account for it, that after being doctored by you, I found myself by the Temple, close to the ditch."

"You!"

"Yes, I. Did you help to take me there?"

"Certainly not, and I should have opposed it if they had consulted me; for the cold might have done you much harm."

"Then I can tell nothing. Will you search a little more with me?"

"I will, if you wish it; but I much fear it will be useless, for all these houses are alike."

"Well, we must come again by day."

"Yes; but then we shall be seen."

"Then we must inquire."

"We will, monseigneur."

"And we shall unravel the mystery. Be sure, Remy, now there are two of us to work."

CHAPTER XI.

M. BRYAN DE MONSOREAU.

It was more than joy, it was almost delirium, which agitated Bussy when he had acquired the certainty that the lady of his dream was a reality, and had, in fact, given him that generous hospitality of which he had preserved the vague remembrance in his heart. He would not let the young doctor go, but, dirty as he was, made him get into the litter with him; he feared that if he lost sight of him he too would vanish like a dream. He would have liked to talk all night of the unknown lady, and explain to Remy how superior she was even to her portrait; but Remy, beginning his functions at once, insisted that he should go to bed; fatigue and pain gave the same counsel, and these united powers carried the point.

The next day, on awaking, he found Remy at his bedside. The young man could hardly believe in his good fortune, and wanted to see Bussy again to be sure of it.

"Well!" said he, "how are you, M. le Comte?"

"Quite well, my dear Esculapius; and you, are you satisfied?"

"So satisfied, my generous protector, that I would not change places with the king. But I now must see the wound."

"Look." And Bussy turned round for the young surgeon to take off the bandage. All looked well; the wound was nearly closed. Bussy, quite happy, had slept well, and sleep and happiness had aided the doctor.

"Well," said Bussy, "what do you say?"

"I dare not tell you that you are nearly well, for fear you should send me back to the Rue Beauheillis, five hundred paces from the famous house."

"Which we will find, will we not, Remy?"

"I should think so."

"Well, my friend, look on yourself as one of the house, and to-day, while you move your things, let me go to the fete of the installation of the new chief huntsman."

"Ah! you want to commit follies already."

"No, I promise to be very reasonable."

"But you must ride."

"It is necessary."

"Have you a horse with an easy pace?"

"I have four to choose from."

"Well, take for to-day the one you would choose for the lady of the portrait you know."

"Know! Ah, Remy, you have found the way to my heart forever; I feared you would prevent me from going to this chase, or rather this imitation of one, and all the ladies of the court, and many from the city, will be admitted to it. Now, Remy, this lady may be there. She certainly is not a simple bourgeoise—those tapestries, that bed, so much luxury as well as good taste, show a woman of quality, or, at least, a rich one. If I were to meet her there!"

"All is possible," replied Remy, philosophically.

"Except to find the house," sighed Bussy. "Or to penetrate when we have found it. Oh! I have a method."

"What is it?"

"Get another sword wound."

"Good; that gives me the hope that you will keep me."

"Be easy, I feel as if I had known you for twenty years, and could not do without you."

The handsome face of the young doctor grew radiant with joy.

"Well, then," said he, "it is decided; you go to the chase to look for the lady, and I go to look for the house."

"It will be curious if we each succeed."

There had been a great chase commanded in the Bois de Vincennes, for M. de Monsoreau to enter on his functions of chief huntsman. Most people had believed, from the scene of the day before, that the king would not attend, and much astonishment was expressed when it was announced that he had set off with his brother and all the court. The rendezvous was at the Point St. Louis. It was thus they named a cross-road where the martyr king used to sit under an oak-tree and administer justice. Every one was therefore assembled here at nine o'clock, when the new officer, object of the general curiosity, unknown as he was to almost every one, appeared on a magnificent black horse. All eyes turned toward him.

He was a man about thirty-five, tall, marked by the small-pox, and with a disagreeable expression. Dressed in a jacket of green cloth braided with silver, with a silver shoulder belt, on which the king's arms were embroidered in gold; on his head a cap with a long plume; in his left hand a spear, and in his right the éstortuaire* destined for the king, M. de Monsoreau, might look like a terrible warrior, but not certainly like a handsome cavalier.

"Fie! what an ugly figure you have brought us, monseigneur," said Bussy to the Duc d'Anjou, "are these the sort of gentlemen that your favor seeks for out of the provinces? Certainly, one could hardly find such in Paris, which is nevertheless as well stocked with ugliness. They say that your highness made a great point of the king's appointing this man."

"M. de Monsoreau has served me well, and I recompense him," replied the duke.

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* The éstortuaire was a stick, which the chief huntsman presented to the king, to put aside the branches of the trees when he was going at full gallop.

"Well said, monseigneur, it is rare for princes to be grateful; but if that be all, I also have served you well, and should wear the embroidered jacket more gracefully, I trust, than M. de Monsoreau. He has a red beard, I see also, which is an additional beauty."

"I never knew that a man must be an Apollo, or Antinous, to fill an office at court."

"You never heard it; astonishing!"

"I consult the heart and not the face—the services rendered and promised."

"Your highness will say I am very envious; but I search, and uselessly, I confess, to discover what service this Monsoreau can have rendered you."

"You are too curious, Bussy," said the duke, angrily.

"Just like princes," cried Bussy, with his ordinary freedom, "they ask you everything; but if you ask a question in return, you are too curious."

"Well! go and ask M. de Monsoreau, himself."

"Ah! you are right. He is but a simple gentleman, and if he do not reply, I shall know what to say."

"What?"

"Tell him he is impertinent." And, turning from the prince, Bussy approached M. de Monsoreau, who was in the midst of the circle.

Bussy approached, gay and smiling, and his hat in his hand.

"Pardon, monsieur, but you seem all alone. Is it that the favor which you enjoy has already made you enemies?"

"I do not know, monsieur, but it is probable. But, may I ask, to what I owe the honor that you do me in invading my solitude?"

"Ma foi! to the great admiration that M. le Duc d'Anjou has inspired in me for you."

"How so?"

"By recounting to me the exploit for which you were made chief huntsman."

M. de Monsoreau grew so frightfully pale, that the marks in his face looked like black spots on his yellow skin; at the same time he looked at Bussy in a manner that portended a violent storm. Bussy saw that he had done wrong; but he was not a man to draw back; on the contrary, he was one of those who generally repair an indiscretion by an impertinence.

"You say, monsieur," said Monsoreau, "that the duke recounted to you my last exploit?"

"Yes, monsieur, but I should much like to hear the story from your own lips."

M. de Monsoreau clasped his dagger tighter in his hand, as though he longed to attack Bussy.

"Ma foi! monsieur," said he, "I was quite disposed to grant your request, and recognize your courtesy, but unfortunately here is the king arriving, so we must leave it for another time."

Indeed, the king, mounted on his favorite Spanish horse, advanced rapidly toward them. He loved handsome faces, and was therefore little pleased with that of M. de Monsoreau. However, he accepted, with a good grace, the éstortuaire which he presented to him, kneeling, according to custom. As soon as the king was armed, the chase commenced.

Bussy watched narrowly every one that passed, looking for the original of the portrait, but in vain; there were pretty, even beautiful and charming women, but not the charming creature whom he sought for. He was reduced to conversation, and the company of his ordinary friends. Antragues, always laughing and talking, was a great amusement.

"We have a frightful chief huntsman," said he to Bussy, "do you not think so?"

"I find him horrible; what a family it must be if his children are like him. Do you know his wife?"

"He is not married."

"How do you know?"

"From Madame de Vendron, who finds him very handsome, and would willingly make him her fourth husband. See how she keeps near him."

"What property has he?"

"Oh! a great deal in Anjou."

"Then he is rich?"

"They say so, but that is all; he is not of very good birth. But see, there is M. le Duc d'Anjou calling to you."

"Ah! ma foi, he must wait. I am

curious about this man. I find him singular, I hardly know why. And such an odd name."

"Oh! it comes from Mons Soricis; Livarot knows all about that.—Here, Livarot; this Monsoreau—"

"Well."

"Tell us what you know about him—"

"Willingly. Firstly, I am afraid of him."

"Good; that is what you think; now tell us what you know."

"Listen. I was going home one night—"

"It begins in a terrible manner."

"Pray let me finish. It was about six months ago, I was returning from my uncle D'Entragues, through the wood of Meridor, when all at once I heard a frightful cry, and I saw pass, with an empty saddle, a white horse, rushing through the wood. I rode on, and at the end of a long avenue, darkened by the approaching shades of night, I saw a man on a black horse; he seemed to fly. Then I heard again the same cry, and I distinguished before him on the saddle a woman, on whose mouth he had his hand. I had a gun in my hand—you know I aim well, and I should have killed him, but my gun missed fire."——"Well?"

"I asked a woodcutter who this gentleman on the black horse was, and he said, 'M. de Monsoreau.'"

"Well," said Antragues, "it is not so uncommon to carry away a woman, is it, Bussy?"

"No; but, at least, one might let them cry out."

"And who was the woman?"

"That I do not know; but he has a bad reputation."

"Do you know anything else about him?"

"No; but he is much feared by his tenantry. However, he is a good hunter, and will fill his post better than St. Luc would have done, for whom it was first destined."

"Do you know where St. Luc is?"

"No; is he still the king's prisoner?"

"Not at all; he set off at one o'clock this morning to visit his country house with his wife."

"Banished?"

"It looks like it."

"Impossible!"

"True as the Gospel; Marshal de Brissac told me so this morning."

"Well! it has served M. de Monsoreau—"

"Ah! I know now."

"Know what?"

"The service that he rendered to the duke."

"Who? St. Luc?"

"No; Monsoreau."

"Really."

"Yes, you shall see; come with me," and Bussy, followed by Livarot and Antragues, galloped after the Duc d'Anjou.

"Ah, monseigneur," said he, "what a precious man M. de Monsoreau is."

"Ah! really; then you spoke to him?"

"Certainly."

"And asked him what he had done for me?"

"Certainly; that was all I spoke to him for."

"And what did he say?"

"He courteously confessed that he was your purveyor."

"Of game?"

"No; of women."

"What do you mean, Bussy?" cried the duke, angrily.

"I mean, monseigneur, that he carries away women for you on his great black horse, and that as they are ignorant of the honor reserved for them, he puts his hand on their mouths to prevent their crying out."

The duke frowned, and ground his teeth with anger, grew pale, and galloped on so fast, that Bussy and his companions were left in the rear.

"Ah! ah! it seems that the joke is a good one," said Antragues.

"And so much the better, that every one does not seem to find it a joke," said Bussy.

A moment after, they heard the duke's voice calling Bussy. He went, and found the duke laughing.

"Oh!" said he, "it appears that what I said was droll."

"I am not laughing at what you said."

"So much the worse; I should have liked to have made a prince laugh, who hardly ever does so."

"I laugh at your inventing a false story to find out the true one."

"No, I told you the truth."

"Well, then, as we are alone, tell me your little history. Where did it happen?"

"In the wood of Meridor."

The duke grew pale again, but did not speak.

"Decidedly," thought Bussy, "the duke is mixed up with that story. Pardieu! monseigneur," said he, "as M. de Monsoreau seems to have found the method of pleasing you so well, teach it to me."

"Pardieu! yes, Bussy, I will tell you how. Listen; I met, by chance, at church, a charming woman, and as some features of her face, which I only saw through a veil, recalled to me a lady whom I had much loved, I followed her, and found out where she lived. I have gained over her servant, and have a key of the house."

"Well, monseigneur, all seems to go well for you."

"But they say she is a great prude, although free, young, and beautiful."

"Ah! you are romancing."

"Well, you are brave, and love me?"

"I have my days."

"For being brave?"

"No, for loving you."

"Well, is this one of the days?"

"I will try and make it one, if I can serve your highness."

"Well, I want you to do for me what most people do for themselves."

"Make love to her, to find out if she be a prude?"

"No, find out if she has a lover. I want you to lay in wait and discover who the man is that visits her."

"There is a man then?"

"I fear so."——"Lover, or husband?"

"That is what I want to know."

"And you want me to find out?"

"If you will do me that great favor—"

"You will make me the next chief huntsman."

"I have never yet done anything for you."

"Oh! you have discovered that at last."

"Well, do you consent?"

"To watch the lady?"

"Yes."

"Monseigneur, I confess I do not like the commission."

"You offered to do me a service, and you draw back already!"

"Because you want me to be a spy."

"I ask you as a friend."

"Monseigneur, this is a sort of thing that every man must do for himself, even if he be a prince."

"Then you refuse?"

"Ma foi! yes."

The duke frowned. "Well, I will go myself," said he, "and if I am killed or wounded, I shall say that I begged my friend Bussy to undertake the task, and that for the first time he was prudent."

"Monseigneur, you said to me the other night, 'Bussy, I hate all those minions of the king's who are always laughing at and insulting us; go to this wedding of St. Luc's, pick a quarrel and try to get rid of them. I went; they were five, and I was alone. I defied them all; they laid wait for me, attacked me all together, and killed my horse, yet I wounded three of them. To-day you ask me to wrong a woman. Pardon, monseigneur, but that is past the service which a prince should exact from a gallant man, and I refuse."

"So be it; I will do my work myself, or with Aurilly, as I have done already."

"Oh!" said Bussy, with a sudden thought.——"What?"

"Were you engaged on it the night when you saw the ambush laid for me?"

"Just so."

"Then your beautiful unknown lives near the Bastille."

"Opposite the Rue St. Catherine. It is a dangerous place, as you know."

"Has your highness been there since?"

"Yesterday."

"And you saw?"

"A man spying all about, and who at last stopped at her door."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, at first. Afterward he was joined by another, with a lantern in his hand."——"Ah!"

"Then they began to talk together, and at last, tired of waiting, I went away. And before I venture into the house where I might be killed—"

"You would like one of your friends to try it."

"They would not have my enemies, nor run the same risk; and then they might report to me—".

"In your place I would give up this woman."

"No, she is too beautiful."

"You said you hardly saw her."

"I saw her enough to distinguish splendid blonde hair, magnificent eyes, and such a complexion!"

"Ah! ah!"

"You understand! one does not easily renounce such a woman."

"No, I feel for you."——"You jest."

"No, on my word, and the proof is, that if you will give me my instructions, I will watch this evening."

"You retract your decision."

"There is no one but the pope infallible; now tell me what I am to do."

"You will have to hide a little way off, and if a man enter, follow him to find out who he is."

"But if, in entering, he close the door behind him?"

"I told you I had a key."

"Ah! true; then there is only one more thing to fear, that I should follow a wrong man to a wrong door."

"You cannot mistake; this door is the door of an alley, and at the end of the alley there is a staircase; mount twelve steps, and you will be in a corridor."

"How do you know all this, if you have never been in?"

"Did I not tell you I had gained over the servant? She told me all."

"Mon Dieu! how convenient it is to be a prince. I should have had to find out all for myself, which would have taken me an enormous time, and I might have failed after all."

"Then you consent?"

"Can I refuse your highness? But will you come with me to show me the house?"

"Useless; as we return from the chase, we will make a detour, and pass through the Porte St. Antoine, and I will point it out to you."

"Very well, and what am I to do to the man if he comes?"

"Only follow him till you learn who he is. I leave to you your mode of action. And not a word to any one."

"No, on my honor."

"And you will go alone?"

"Quite."

"Well, then, it is settled; I show you the door on our way home; then you come with me, and I give you the key."

Bussy and the prince then rejoined the rest. The king was charmed with the manner in which M. de Monsoreau had conducted the chase.

"Monseigneur," then said M. de Monsoreau to the duke, "I owe my place and these compliments to you."

"But you know that you must go to-night to Fontainebleau, where the king will hunt to-morrow and the day after."

"I know, monseigneur; I am prepared to start to-night."

"Ah, M. de Monsoreau, there is no more rest for you," said Bussy, "you wished to be chief huntsman, and you are so, and now you will have at least fifty nights' rest less than other men. Luckily you are not married."

At this joke, Monsoreau's face was covered once more with that hideous paleness which gave to him so sinister an aspect.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW BUSSY FOUND BOTH THE PORTRAIT AND THE ORIGINAL.

THE chase terminated about four o'clock in the evening, and at five all the court returned to Paris. As they passed by the Bastille, the duke said to Bussy, "Look to the right, at that little wooden house with a statue of the Virgin before it; well, count four houses from that. It is the fifth you have to go to, just fronting the Rue St. Catherine."

"I see it; and look! at the sound of the trumpets announcing the king, all the windows are filled with gazers."

"Except the one I show you, where the curtains remain closed."

"But there is a corner lifted," said Bussy, with a beating heart.

"Yes, but we can see nothing. The lady is well guarded. However, that is the house."

When Bussy returned, he said to Remy, "Have you discovered the house?"

"No, monseigneur."

"Well, I believe I have been more lucky."

"How so, monsieur, have you been seeking?"

"I passed through the street."

"And you recognized the house?"

"Providence, my dear friend, has mysterious ways."

"Then you are sure?"

"Not sure, but I hope."

"And when shall I know if you are right?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Meanwhile, do you want me?"

"No, my dear Remy."

"Shall I not follow you?"

"Impossible."

"Be prudent, monseigneur."

"Ah! the recommendation is useless, my prudence is well known."

Bussy dined like a man who does not know when he will sup, then, at eight o'clock, choosing the best of his swords, and attaching, in spite of the king's orders, a pair of pistols to his belt, went in his litter to the corner of the Rue St. Paul.

He easily recognized the house again, and then, wrapped in his cloak, hid at the corner of the street, determined to wait for two hours, and at the end of that time, if no one came, to act for himself. He had scarcely been there ten minutes, when he saw two cavaliers coming. One of them dismounted, gave his horse to the other, who was probably a lackey, and who went away with the horses, and advanced toward the house pointed out to Bussy, and, after glancing round to see if he were observed, opened the door and went in. Bussy waited two or three minutes, and then followed him. He advanced slowly and softly, found the staircase, and went up. In the corridor he stopped, for he heard a voice say, "Gertrude, tell your mistress that it is I, and that I must come in."

This was said in an imperious tone, and, a minute after, Bussy heard a woman's voice say:

"Pass into the drawing-room, monsieur, and madame will come to you."

Then he heard the sound of a door shutting. He made a few steps silently, and extending his hand, felt a door; he went in, found a second, in which was a key; he turned it, and entered the room tremblingly. The room in which he found himself was dark, except from the light shining from another. By this he could see two windows, hung with tapestry, which sent a thrill of joy through the young man's heart. On the ceiling he could faintly see the mythological figures; he extended his hand, and felt the sculptured bed. There was no more doubt, he was in the room where he had awakened the night of his wound.

Bussy hid behind the bed-curtains to listen. He heard in the adjoining room the impatient step of the unknown; from time to time he stopped, murmuring between his teeth, "Will she come?"

Presently a door opened, and the rustling of a silk dress struck on Bussy's ear. Then he heard a woman's voice, expressive at once of fear and disdain, saying:

"Here I am, monsieur, what do you want now?"

"Madame," replied the man, "I have the honor of telling you that, forced to set off to-morrow morning for Fontainebleau, I come to pass the night with you."

"Do you bring me news of my father?"

"Madame, listen to me—"

"Monsieur, you know what we agreed yesterday, when I consented to become your wife, that, before all things, either my father should come to Paris, or I should go to him."

"Madame, as soon as I return from Fontainebleau, I give you my word of honor, but meanwhile—"

"Oh! monsieur, do not close that door, it is useless; I will not pass a single night under the same roof with you until you bring me my father." And the lady,

who spoke thus, whistled through a silver whistle, which was then the manner of calling servants.

Immediately the door opened, and a young, vigorous-looking girl entered. As she went in, she left the door open, which threw a strong light into the room where Bussy was hid, and between the two windows he saw the portrait. Bussy now crept noiselessly along to where he could peep into the room. However carefully he moved, the floor creaked. At the noise the lady turned, she was the original of the portrait. The man, seeing her turn, turned also; it was M. de Monsoreau.

"Ah!" thought Bussy, "the white horse, the woman carried away, there is some terrible history."

Bussy, as we have said, could see them both; she, standing up, pale and disdainful. He, not pale, but livid, agitated his foot impatiently.

"Madame," said he, at last, "do not hope to continue with me this character of a persecuted woman; you are at Paris, in my house, and, still more, you are Comtesse de Monsoreau, that is to say, my wife."

"If I am your wife, why refuse to conduct me to my father? Why continue to hide me from the eyes of the world?"

"You have forgotten the Duc d'Anjou, madame."

"You assured me that, once your wife, I should have no more to fear from him."

"That is to say—"

"You promised me that."

"But still, madame, I must take precautions."

"Well, monsieur, when you have taken them, return to me."

"Diana," said the count, who was growing visibly angry, "Diana, do not make a jest of this sacred tie."

"Act so, monsieur, that I can have confidence in the husband, and I will respect the marriage."

"Oh! this is too much!" cried the count, "I am in my own house, you are my wife, and this night you shall be mine."

Bussy put his hand on his sword-hilt, and made a step forward, but Diana did not give him time to appear.

"Stay," said she, drawing a poniard from her belt, "here is my answer." And rushing into the room where Bussy was, she shut the door and locked it, while Monsoreau exhausted himself in menaces and in blows on the door.

"If you break this door you will find me dead on the threshold."

"And be easy, madame, you shall be revenged," said Bussy.

Diana was about to utter a cry, but her fear of her husband was strong enough to restrain her. She remained pale and trembling, but mute.

M. de Monsoreau struck violently with his foot, but convinced that Diana would execute her menace, went out of the drawing-room, shutting the door violently behind him. Then they heard him going down the stairs.

"But you, monsieur," said Diana, turning to Bussy, "who are you, and how came you here?"

"Madame," said Bussy, opening the door, and kneeling before her, "I am the man whose life you preserved. You cannot think that I come to your house with any bad designs." As the light streamed in, Diana recognized him at once.

"Ah! you here, monsieur," cried she, clasping her hands, "you were here—you heard all?"

"Alas! yes, madame."

"But who are you? your name, monsieur?"

"Madame, I am Louis de Clermont, comte de Bussy."

"Bussy! you are the brave Bussy!" cried Diana, filling with joy the heart of the young man. "Ah! Gertrude!" cried she, turning to her servant, who, hearing her mistress talking to some one, had entered in terror, "Gertrude, I have no more to fear, for from this time I place myself under the safeguard of the most noble and loyal gentleman in France." Then, holding out her hand to Bussy:

"Rise, monsieur," said she, "I know who you are, now you must know who I am."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHO DIANA WAS.

Bussy rose, bewildered at his own happiness, and entered with Diana into the room which M. de Monsoreau had just quitted. He looked at Diana with astonishment and admiration; he had not dared to hope that the woman whom he had sought for would equal the woman of his dream, and now the reality surpassed all that he had taken for a caprice of his imagination. Diana was about nineteen, that is to say, in the first éclât of that youth and beauty which gives the purest coloring to the flower, the finest flavor to the fruit. There was no mistaking the looks of Bussy; Diana felt herself admired. At last she broke the silence.

"Monsieur," said she, "you have told me who you are, but not how you came here."

"Madame, the cause of my presence here will come naturally out of the recital you have been good enough to promise me; I am sure of it, from some words of your conversation with M. de Monsoreau."

"I will tell you all, monsieur: your name has been sufficient to inspire me with full confidence, for I have always heard of it as of that of a man of honor, loyalty, and courage."

Bussy bowed, and Diana went on:

"I am the daughter of the Baron de Meridor—that is to say, the only heiress of one of the noblest and oldest names in Anjou."

"There was," said Bussy, "a Baron de Meridor, who, although he could have saved himself, came voluntarily and gave up his sword at the battle of Pavia, when he heard that the king was a prisoner, and begged to accompany Francis to Madrid, partook his captivity, and only quitted him to come to France and negotiate his ransom."

"It was my father, monsieur, and if ever you enter the great hall of the Chateau de Meridor, you will see, given in memory of this devotion, the portrait of Francis I., painted by Leonardo da Vinci."——"Ah!" said Bussy, "in those times kings knew how to recompense their followers."

"On his return from Spain my father married. His two first children, sons, died. This was a great grief to the Baron de Meridor. When the king died, my father quitted the court, and shut himself up with his wife in the Chateau de Meridor. It was there that I was born, ten years after the death of my brothers.

"Then all the love of the baron was concentrated on the child of his old age; his love for me was idolatry. Three years after my birth I lost my mother, and, too young to feel my loss, my smiles helped to console my father. As I was all to him, so was he also all to me. I attained my sixteenth year without dreaming of any other world than that of my sheep, my peacocks, my swans, and my doves, without imagining that this life would change, or wishing that it should.

"The castle of Meridor was surrounded by vast forests, belonging to the Duc d'Anjou; they were filled with deer and stags, whom no one thought of tormenting, and who had grown quite familiar to me; some of them would even come when I called them, and one, a doe, my favorite Daphne, my poor Daphne, would come and eat out of my hand.

"One spring I had missed her for a month, and was ready to weep for her as for a friend, when she reappeared with two little fawns. At first they were afraid of me, but seeing their mother caress me, they soon learned to do the same.

"About this time we heard that the Duc d'Anjou had sent a governor into the province, and that he was called the Comte de Monsoreau. A week passed, during which every one spoke of the new governor. One morning the woods resounded with the sound of the horn, and the barking of dogs. I ran to the park, and arrived just in time to see Daphne, followed by her two fawns, pass like lightning, pursued by a pack of hounds. An instant after, mounted on a black horse, M. de Monsoreau flew past me.

"I cried out and implored pity for my poor protégée, but he did not hear me. Then I ran after him, hoping to meet either the count or some of his suite, and

determined to implore them to stop this chase, which pierced my heart. I ran for some time without knowing where, for I had lost sight of both dogs and hunters.

"Soon I could not even hear them, so I sat down at the foot of a tree, and began to cry. I had been there about a quarter of an hour when I heard the chase again. The noise came nearer and nearer, and, darting forward, I saw my poor Daphne again; she had but one fawn with her now, the other had given way through fatigue. She herself was growing visibly tired, and the distance between her and the hounds was less than when I saw her first.

"As before, I exerted myself in vain to make myself heard. M. de Monsereau saw nothing but the animal he was chasing; he passed more quickly than ever, with his horn to his mouth, which he was sounding loudly. Behind him, two or three hunters animated the dogs with horn and voice. All passed me like a tempest, and disappeared in the forest. I was in despair, but I ran on once more, and followed a path which I knew led to the castle of Beauge, belonging to the Duc d'Anjou, and which was about six miles from the castle of Meridor. It was not till I arrived there that I remembered that I was alone, and far from home.

"I confess that a vague terror seized me, and that then only I thought of the imprudence and folly of my conduct. I followed the border of the lake, intending to ask the gardener (who, when I had come there with my father, had often given me bouquets) to take me home, when all at once I heard the sound of the chase again. I remained motionless, listening, and I forgot all else. Nearly at the same moment the doe reappeared, coming out of the wood on the other side of the lake, but pursued so closely that she must be taken immediately. She was alone, her second fawn had fallen, but the sight of the water seemed to reanimate her, and she plunged in as if she would have come to me. At first she swam rapidly, and I looked at her with tears in my eyes, and almost as breathless as herself; insensibly her strength failed her, while the dogs seemed to grow more and more earnest in their pursuit. Soon some of them reached her, and, stopped by their bites, she ceased to advance. At this moment, M. de Monsoreau appeared at the border of the lake, and jumped off his horse. Then I collected all my strength to cry for pity, with clasped hands. It seemed to me that he saw me, and I cried again. He heard me, for he looked at me; then he ran toward a boat, entered it, and advanced rapidly toward the animal, who was fighting among the dogs. I did not doubt that, moved by my voice, he was hastening to bring her succor, when all at once I saw him draw his hunting knife, and plunge it into the neck of the poor animal. The blood flowed out, reddening the water of the lake, while the poor doe uttered a doleful cry, beat the water with her feet, reared up, and then fell back dead.

"I uttered a cry almost as doleful as hers, and fell fainting on the bank. When I came to myself again, I was in bed, in a room of the chateau of Beauge, and my father, who had been sent for, standing by me. As it was nothing but overexcitement, the next morning I was able to return home; although I suffered for three or four days. Then my father told me that M. de Monsoreau, who had seen me, when I was carried to the castle, had come to ask after me; he had been much grieved when he heard that he had been the involuntary cause of my accident, and begged to present his excuses to me, saying that he could not be happy until he had his pardon from my own lips.

"It would have been ridiculous to refuse to see him, so, in spite of my repugnance, I granted his request. He came the next day; I felt that my behavior must have seemed strange, and I excused it on the ground of my affection for Daphne. The count swore twenty times that had he known I had any interest in his victim, he would have spared her with pleasure; but his protestations did not convince me, nor remove the unfavorable impression I had formed of him. When he took leave, he asked my father's permission to come again. He had been born in Spain and educated at Madrid,

and it was an attraction for my father to talk over the place where he had been so long a prisoner. Besides, the count was of good family, deputy-governor of the province, and a favorite, it was said, of the Duc d'Anjou; my father had no motive for refusing his request, and it was granted. Alas! from this moment ceased, if not my happiness, at least my tranquillity. I soon perceived the impression I had made on the count he began to come every day, and was full of attentions to my father, who showed the pleasure he took in his conversation, which was certainly that of a clever man.

"One morning my father entered my room with an air graver than usual, but still evidently joyful. 'My child,' said he, 'you always have said you did not wish to leave me.'

"'Oh! my father,' cried I, 'it is my dearest wish.'

"'Well, my Diana,' continued he, embracing me, 'it only depends now on yourself to have your wish realized.' I guessed what he was about to say, and grew dreadfully pale.

"'Diana, my child, what is the matter?' cried he.

"'M. de Monsoreau, is it not?' stammered I. 'Well?' said he, astonished. 'Oh! never, my father, if you have any pity for your daughter, never—'

"'Diana, my love,' said he, 'it is not pity I have for you, but idolatry; you know it; take a week to reflect, and if then—'

"'Oh! no, no,' cried I, 'it is useless; not a day, not a minute! No, no, no!' and I burst into tears. My father adored me, and he took me in his arms, and gave me his word that he would speak to me no more of this marriage.

"Indeed, a month passed, during which I neither heard of nor saw M. de Monsoreau. One morning we received an invitation to a grand fete which M. de Monsoreau was to give to the Duc d'Anjou, who was about to visit the province whose name he bore. To this was added a personal invitation from the prince, who had seen my father at court. My first impulse was to beg my father to refuse, but he feared to offend the prince, so we went. M. de Monsoreau received us as though nothing had passed, and behaved to me exactly as he did to the other ladies.

"Not so the duke. As soon as he saw me, he fixed his eyes on me, and scarcely ever removed them. I felt ill at ease under these looks, and begged my father to go home early. Three days after M. de Monsoreau came to Meridor; I saw him from the window, and shut myself up in my own room. When he was gone, my father said nothing to me, but I thought he looked gloomy.

"Four days passed thus, when, as I was returning from a walk, the servants told me that M. de Monsoreau was with my father, who had asked for me several times, and had desired to be immediately informed of my return. Indeed, no sooner had I entered my room, than my father came to me.

"'My child,' said he, 'a motive which I cannot explain to you, forces me to separate myself from you for some days. Do not question me, but be sure that it is an urgent one, since it determines me to be a week, a fortnight, perhaps a month, without seeing you.' I trembled, I knew not why, but I fancied that the visits of M. de Monsoreau boded me no good.

"'Where am I to go, my father?' asked I.

"'To the chateau of Lude, to my sister, where you will be hidden from all eyes. You will go by night.' 'And do you not accompany me?' 'No, I must stay here, to ward off suspicion; even the servants must not know where you are going.' 'But then, who will take me there?' 'Two men whom I can trust.' 'Oh! mon Dieu! father,' I cried. The baron embraced me. 'It is necessary, my child,' said he.

"I knew my father's love for me so well that I said no more, only I asked that Gertrude, my nurse, should accompany me. My father quitted me, telling me to get ready.

"At eight o'clock (it was dark and cold, for it was the middle of winter) my father came for me. We descended quietly, crossed the garden, when he opened him-

self a little door leading to the forest, and there we found a litter waiting, and two men; my father spoke to them, then I got in, and Gertrude with me.

"My father embraced me once more, and we set off. I was ignorant what danger menaced me, and forced me to quit the castle of Meridor. I did not dare to question my conductors, whom I did not know. We went along quietly, and the motion of the litter at last sent me to sleep, when I was awoke by Gertrude, who, seizing my arm, cried out, 'Oh, mademoiselle, what is the matter?'

"I passed my head through the curtains. We were surrounded by six masked cavaliers, and our men, who had tried to defend me, were disarmed. He who appeared the chief of the masked men approached me, and said, "Reassure yourself, mademoiselle, no harm will be done to you, but you must follow us.'

"'Where?' I asked. 'To a place,' he replied, 'where, far from having anything to complain of, you will be treated like a queen.' 'Oh! my father! my father!' I cried. 'Listen, mademoiselle,' said Gertrude, 'I know the environs, and I am strong; we may be able to escape.' 'You must do as you will with us, gentlemen,' said I, 'we are but two poor women, and cannot defend ourselves.' One of the men then took the place of our conductor, and changed the direction of our litter."

Here Diana stopped a moment, as if overcome with emotion.

"Oh, continue, madame, continue," cried Bussy.

It was impossible for Diana not to see the interest she inspired in the young man; it was shown in his voice, his gestures, his looks. She smiled, and went on.

"We continued our journey for about three hours, then the litter stopped. I heard a door open, we went on, and I fancied we were crossing a drawbridge. I was not wrong, for, on looking out of the litter, I saw that we were in the courtyard of a castle. What castle was it? We did not know. Often, during the route, we had tried to discover where we were, but we seemed to be in an endless forest. The door of our litter was opened, and the same man who had spoken to us before asked us to alight. I obeyed in silence. Two men from the castle had come to meet us with torches; they conducted us into a bedroom richly decorated, where a collation waited for us on a table sumptuously laid out.

"'You are at home here, madame,' said the same man, 'and the room for your servant is adjoining. When you wish for anything, you have but to strike with the knocker on this door, and some one, who will be constantly in the antechamber, will wait on you.' This apparent attention showed that we were guarded. Then the man bowed and went out, and we heard him lock the door behind him.

"Gertrude and I were alone. She was about to speak, but I signed her to be silent, for perhaps some one was listening. The door of the room which had been shown us as Gertrude's was open, and we went in to examine it. It was evidently the dressing-room to mine, and was also locked. We were prisoners. Gertrude approached me and said in a low tone: 'Did demoiselle remark that we only mounted five steps after leaving the court?' 'Yes,' said I. 'Therefore we are on the ground-floor.' 'Doubtless.' 'So that—' said she, pointing to the window. 'Yes, if they are not barred.' 'And if mademoiselle had courage.' 'Oh! yes, I have.'

"Gertrude then took a light, and approached the window. It opened easily, and was not barred; but we soon discovered the cause of this seeming negligence on the part of our captors. A lake lay below us, and we were guarded by ten feet of water better than by bolts and bars. But in looking out I discovered where we were. We were in the chateau of Beauge, where they had brought me on the death of my poor Daphne. This castle belonged to the Duc d'Anjou, and a sudden light was thrown upon our capture. We shut the window again, and I threw myself, dressed, on my bed, while Gertrude slept in a chair by my side. Twenty times during the night I woke, a

prey to sudden terror; but nothing justified it, excepting the place where I found myself, for all seemed asleep in the castle, and no noise but the cry of the birds interrupted the silence of the night. Day appeared, but only to confirm my conviction that flight was impossible without external aid; and how could that reach us? About nine they came to take away the supper and bring breakfast. Gertrude questioned the servants, but they did not reply. Our morning passed in fruitless plans for escape, and yet we could see a boat fastened to the shore, with its oars in it. Could we only have reached that, we might have been safe.

"They brought us our dinner in the same way, put it down, and left us. In breaking my bread I found in it a little note. I opened it eagerly, and read, 'A friend watches over you. To-morrow you shall have news of him and of your father.' You can imagine my joy. The rest of the day passed in waiting and hoping. The second night passed as quietly as the first; then came the hour of breakfast, waited for impatiently, for I hoped to find another note. I was not wrong, it was as follows: 'The person who had you carried off will arrive at the castle of Beauge at ten o'clock this evening; but at nine, the friend who watches over you will be under your windows with a letter from your father, which will command the confidence you, perhaps, might not otherwise give. Burn this letter."

"I read and re-read this letter, then burned it as I was desired. The writing was unknown to me, and I did not know from whom it could have come. We lost ourselves in conjectures, and a hundred times during the morning we went to the window to see if we could see any one on the shores of the lake, but all was solitary. An hour after dinner, some one knocked at our door, and then entered. It was the man who had spoken to us before. I recognized his voice; he presented a letter to me.

"'Whom do you come from?' asked I. 'Will mademoiselle take the trouble to read, and she will see.' 'But I will not read this letter without knowing whom it comes from.' 'Mademoiselle can do as she pleases; my business is only to leave the letter,' and putting it down, he went away. 'What shall I do?' asked I of Gertrude. 'Read the letter, mademoiselle; it is better to know what to expect.' I opened and read."

Diana, at this moment, rose, opened a desk, and from a portfolio drew out the letter. Bussy glanced at the address and read, "To the beautiful Diana de Meridor."

Then looking at Diana, he said—

"It is the Duc d'Anjou's writing."

"Ah!" replied she, with a sigh, "then he did not deceive me."

Then, as Bussy hesitated to open the letter—

"Read," said she, "chance has initiated you into the most secret history of my life, and I wish to keep nothing from you."

Bussy obeyed and read—

"An unhappy prince, whom your divine beauty has struck to the heart, will come at ten o'clock to-night to apologize for his conduct toward you—conduct which he himself feels has no other excuse than the invincible love he entertains for you.

"FRANCOIS."

"Then this letter was really from the duke?" asked Diana.

"Alas! yes; it is his writing and his seal."

Diana sighed. "Can he be less guilty than I thought?" said she.

"Who, the prince?"

"No, M. de Monsoreau."

"Continue, madame, and we will judge the prince and the count."

"This letter, which I had then no idea of not believing genuine, rendered still more precious to me the intervention of the unknown friend who offered me aid in the name of my father; I had no hope but in him. Night arrived soon, for it was in the month of January, and we had still four or five hours to wait for the appointed time. It was a fine frosty night; the heavens were brilliant with stars, and the crescent moon lighted the country with its silver beams. We had no means of knowing the time, but we sat

anxiously watching at Gertrude's window. At last we thought we saw figures moving among the trees, and then distinctly heard the neighing of a horse.

"'It is our friends,' said Gertrude. 'Or the prince,' replied I. 'The prince would not hide himself.' This reflection reassured me. A man now advanced alone: it seemed to us that he quitted another group who were left under the shade of the trees. As he advanced, my eyes made violent efforts to pierce the obscurity, and I thought I recognized first the tall figure, then the features, of M. de Monsoreau. I now feared almost as much the help as the danger. I remained mute, and drew back from the window. Arrived at the wall, he secured his boat, and I saw his head at our window. I could not repress a cry.

"'Ah, pardon,' said he, 'but I thought you expected me.' 'I expected some one, monsieur, but I did not know it was you.' A bitter smile passed over his face. 'Who else,' said he, 'except her father, watches over the honor of Diana de Meridor?' 'You told me, monsieur, in your letter, that you came in my father's name.' 'Yes, mademoiselle, and lest you should doubt it, here is a note from the baron,' and he gave me a paper. I read—

"'MY DEAR DIANA—M. de Monsoreau can alone extricate you from your dangerous position, and this danger is immense. Trust, then, to him as to the best friend that Heaven can send to us. I will tell you later what from the bottom of my heart I wish you to do to acquit the debt we shall contract toward him.

"'Your father, who begs you to believe him, and to have pity on him, and on yourself, BARON DE MERIDOR.'

"I knew nothing against M. de Monsoreau; my dislike to him was rather from instinct than reason. I had only to reproach him with the death of a doe, a very light crime for a hunter. I then turned toward him. 'Well?' said he. 'Monsieur, I have read my father's letter, it tells me you will take me from hence, but it does not tell me where you will take me.' 'Where the baron waits for you.' 'And where is that?' 'In the castle of Meridor.' 'Then I shall see my father?' 'In two hours.'

"'Ah! monsieur, if you speak truly—' I stopped. The count waited for the end of my sentence. 'Count on my gratitude,' said I, in a trembling tone, for I knew what he might expect from my gratitude. 'Then, mademoiselle,' said he, 'you are ready to follow me?' I looked at Gertrude. 'Reflect that each minute that passes is most precious,' said he, 'I am nearly half an hour behind time now; it will soon be ten o'clock, and then the prince will be here.' 'Alas! yes.' 'Once he comes, I can do nothing for you but risk without hope that life which I now risk to save you.' 'Why did not my father come?' I asked. 'Your father is watched. They know every step he takes.' 'But you—' 'Oh! I am different; I am the prince's friend and confidant.' 'Then if you are his friend—' 'Yes, I betray him for you; it is true, as I told you just now, I am risking my life to save you.' This seemed so true, that although I still felt repugnance, I could not express it. 'I wait,' said the count, 'and stay; if you still doubt, look there.' I looked, and saw on the opposite shore a body of cavaliers advancing. 'It is the duke and his suite,' said he, 'in five minutes it will be too late.'

"I tried to rise, but my limbs failed me. Gertrude raised me in her arms and gave me to the count. I shuddered at his touch, but he held me fast and placed me in the boat. Gertrude followed without aid. Then I noticed that my veil had come off, and was floating on the water. I thought they would track us by it, and I cried, 'My veil; catch my veil.' The count looked at it and said, 'No, no, better leave it.' And seizing the oars, he rowed with all his strength. We had just reached the bank when we saw the windows of my room lighted up. 'Did I deceive you? Was it time?' said M. de Monsoreau. 'Oh! yes, yes,' cried I, 'you are really my savior.'

"The lights seemed to be moving about from one room to the other. We heard voices, and a man entered who approached

the open window, looked out, saw the floating veil, and uttered a cry. 'You see I did well to leave the veil,' said the count, 'the prince believes that to escape him you threw yourself into the lake.' I trembled at the man who had so instantaneously conceived this idea."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TREATY.

THERE was a moment's silence. Diana seemed almost overcome. Bussy was already vowing eternal vengeance against her enemies. She went on:

"Scarcely had we touched the shore, when seven or eight men ran to us. They were the count's people, and I thought I recognized among them the two men who had escorted me when I left Meridor. A squire held two horses, a black one for the count and a white one for me. The count helped me to mount, and then jumped on his own horse. Gertrude mounted en croupe behind one of the men, and we set off at full gallop. The count held the bridle of my horse. I said to him that I was a sufficiently good horsewoman to dispense with this, but he replied that the horse was inclined to run away. When we had gone about ten minutes, I heard Gertrude's voice calling to me, and turning, I saw that four of the men were taking her by a different path from that which we were following. 'Gertrude,' cried I, 'why does she not come with me?' 'It is an indispensable precaution,' said the count; 'if we are pursued we must leave two tracks, and they must be able to say in two places that they have seen a woman carried away by men. There is then a chance that M. d'Anjou may take a wrong road, and go after your servant instead of you.' Although specious, this reply did not satisfy me, but what could I do? Besides, the path which the count was following was the one which led to the chateau de Meridor. In a quarter of an hour, at the rate at which we were going, we should have been at the castle, when all at once, when we came to a cross-road which I knew well, the count, instead of following the road to the castle, turned to the left, and took a road which led away from it. I cried out, and in spite of our rapid pace had already my hand on the pommel in order to jump off, when the count, seizing me round the waist, drew me off my horse, and placed me on the saddle before him. This action was so rapid that I had only time to utter a cry. M. de Monsoreau put his hand on my mouth, and said, 'Mademoiselle, I swear to you, on my honor, that I only act by your father's orders, as I will prove to you at the first halt we make. If this proof appears to you insufficient, you shall then be free.'

"'But, monsieur,' cried I, pushing away his hand, 'you told me you were taking me to my father!' 'Yes, I told you so, because I saw that you hesitated to follow me, and a moment's more hesitation would have ruined us both, as you know. Now, do you wish to kill your father? Will you march straight to your dishonor? If so, I will take you to Meridor.' 'You spoke of a proof that you acted in the name of my father.' 'Here it is,' said the baron, giving me a letter, 'keep it, and read it at the first stoppage. If, when you have read it, you wish to return to Meridor, you are free; but if you have any respect for your father's wishes you will not.' 'Then, monsieur,' I replied, 'let us reach quickly our stopping-place, for I wish to know if you speak the truth.' 'Remember, you follow me freely.' 'Yes. as freely as a young girl can who sees herself placed between her father's death and her own dishonor on the one hand, and on the other the obligation to trust herself to the word of a man whom she hardly knows. Never mind, I follow you freely, monsieur, as you shall see if you will give me my horse again.' The count called to one of his men to dismount and give me his horse. 'The white mare cannot be far,' said he to the man; 'seek her in the forest and call her, she will come like a dog to her name or to a whistle; you can rejoin us at La Chatre.' I shuddered in spite of myself. La Chatre was ten leagues from Meridor, on the road to Paris. 'Monsieur,' said I, 'I accompany you, but at La Chatre we make our conditions.' 'Mademoiselle, at La Chatre

you shall give me your orders.' At daybreak we arrived at La Chatre, but instead of entering the village we went by a cross-road to a lonely house. I stopped. 'Where are we going?' I asked. 'Mademoiselle,' said the count, 'I appeal to yourself. Can we, in flying from a prince next in power to the king, stop in an ordinary village inn, where the first person would denounce us?' 'Well,' said I, 'go on.' We resumed our way. We were expected, for a man had ridden on before to announce our arrival. A good fire burned in a decent room, and a bed was prepared. 'This is your room,' said the count, 'I will await your orders.' He went out and left me alone. My first thought was for my letter. Here it is, M. de Bussy; read."

Bussy took the letter, and read:

"MY BELOVED DIANA—As I do not doubt that, yielding to my prayer, you have followed the Comte de Monsoreau, he must have told you that you had the misfortune to please M. le Duc d'Anjou, and that it was this prince who had you forcibly carried away and taken to the castle of Beauge; judge by this violence of what the prince is capable, and with what you were menaced. Your dishonor I could not survive; but there is a means of escape—that of marrying our noble friend. Once Countess of Monsoreau, the count would protect his wife. My desire is, then, my darling daughter, that this marriage should take place as soon as possible, and if you consent I give you my paternal benediction, and pray God to bestow upon you every treasure of happiness.

"Your father, who does not order, but entreats, BARON DE MERIDOR."

"Alas!" said Bussy, "if this letter be from your father, it is but too positive."

"I do not doubt its being from him, and yet I read it three times before deciding. At last I called the count. He entered at once; I had the letter in my hand. 'Well, have you read it?' said he. 'Yes,' I replied. 'Do you still doubt my devotion and respect?' 'This letter imposes belief on me, monsieur; but in case I yield to my father's wishes, what do you propose to do?' 'To take you to Paris, mademoiselle; that is the easiest place to hide you.' 'And my father?' 'As soon as there is no longer danger of compromising you, you know he will come to you, wherever you are.' 'Well, monsieur, I am ready to accept your protection on the conditions you impose.'

"'I impose nothing, mademoiselle,' answered he, 'I simply offer you a method of safety.' 'Well, I will accept this safety on three conditions.' 'Speak, mademoiselle.' 'The first is, that Gertrude shall return to me.' 'She is here.' 'The second is, that we travel separately to Paris.' 'I was about to propose it to you.' 'And the third is, that our marriage, unless I myself acknowledge some urgent necessity for it, shall only take place in presence of my father.' 'It is my earnest desire; I count on his benediction to draw upon us that of Heaven.'

"I was in despair. I had hoped for some opposition to my wishes. 'Now, mademoiselle,' said he, 'allow me to give you some advice.' 'I listen, monsieur.' 'Only to travel by night.' 'Agreed.' 'To let me choose the route, and the places where you should stop. All my precautions will be taken with the sole aim of escaping the Duc d'Anjou.' 'I have no objection to make, monsieur.' 'Lastly, at Paris, to occupy the lodging I shall prepare for you, however simple and out of the way it may be.' 'I only ask to live hidden, monsieur, the more out of the way, the better it will suit me.' 'Then, as we are agreed on all points, mademoiselle, it only remains for me to present to you my humble respects, and to send to you your femme-de-chambre.' 'On my side, monsieur, be sure that if you keep all your promises, I will keep mine.' 'That is all I ask,' said the count, 'and the promise makes me the happiest of men.'

"With these words, he bowed and went out. Five minutes after, Gertrude entered. The joy of this good girl was great; she had believed herself separated from me forever. I told her all that had passed. As I finished, we heard the sound of a horse's hoofs. I ran to the

window; it was M. de Monsoreau going away. He had fulfilled two articles of the treaty. We passed all the day in that little house, served by our hostess; in the evening the chief of our escort appeared, and asked me if I was ready. I said yes, and five minutes after we set off. At the door I found my white mare. We traveled all night, and stopped at daybreak. I calculated we had gone about thirty-five miles, but my horse had a very easy pace, and on leaving the house a fur cloak had been thrown over me to protect me from the cold. It took us seven days to reach Paris in this manner, and I saw nothing of the count. We entered the city at night, and the first object I saw, after passing through the gate, was an immense monastery; then we crossed the river, and in ten minutes we were in the Place de la Bastille. Then a man, who seemed to be waiting for us, advanced and said, 'It is here.' The chief of our escort jumped off his horse, and presented me his hand to dismount also. A door was open, and the staircase lighted by a lamp. 'Madame,' said the man to me, 'you are now at home. At this door finishes the mission I received; may I flatter myself I have fulfilled it according to your wishes?' 'Yes, monsieur,' said I, 'I have only thanks to give you. Offer them in my name to all your men; I would wish to reward them in a better manner, but I possess nothing.' 'Do not be uneasy about that, madame,' said he, 'they are largely recompensed.'

"Then the little troop went away, and we went up the stairs of our house, and found ourselves in a corridor. Three doors were open; we entered the middle one, and found ourselves in the room where we now stand. On opening the door of my bedroom, to my great astonishment I found my own portrait there. It was one which had hung at Meridor, and the count had doubtless begged it of my father. I trembled at this new proof that my father regarded me already as his wife.

"Nothing was wanting in the rooms; a fire burned in the grate, and a supper was ready in the sitting-room. I saw with satisfaction that it was laid for one only, and yet when Gertrude said, 'Well, mademoiselle, you see the count keeps his promises.'—'Alas! yes,' replied I, with a sigh, for I should have preferred that by breaking his word he should have given me an excuse to break mine. After supper, we examined the house, but found no one in it. The next day Gertrude went out, and from her I learned that we were at the end of the Rue St. Antoine, near the Bastille. That evening, as we were sitting down to supper, some one knocked. I grew pale.

"'If it be the count?' asked Gertrude. 'You must open to him; he has kept his promises, and I must keep mine.' A moment after he entered. 'Well, madame,' said he, 'have I kept my word?' 'Yes, monsieur, and I thank you for it.' 'Then you will receive me?' said he, with an ironical smile. 'Enter, monsieur,' said I, 'have you any news?' 'Of what, madame?' 'Of my father, firstly?' 'I have not been to Meridor, and have not seen the baron.' 'Then of Beauge, and the Duc d'Anjou?' 'I have been to Beauge, and have spoken to the duke.' 'What does he say?' 'He appears to doubt.' 'Of what?' 'Of your death.' 'But you confirmed it?' 'I did all I could.' 'Where is the duke?' I then asked. 'He returned to Paris yesterday. One does not like to stay in a place where one has the death of a woman to reproach one's self with.' 'Have you seen him in Paris?' 'I have just left him.' 'Did he speak of me?' 'I did not give him time; I spoke incessantly of a promise which he made to me.' 'What is it?' 'He promised me, as a reward for services rendered to him, to make me chief huntsman.' 'Ah, yes,' said I, thinking of my poor Daphne; 'you are a terrible hunter, I know.' 'It is not for that reason I obtain it, but the duke dare not be ungrateful to me.'

"'Can I write to my father?' said I. 'Doubtless; but your letters may be intercepted.' 'Am I forbidden to go out?' 'Nothing is forbidden; but I beg to point out to you that you may be followed.' 'At least I must go on Sunday to mass.' 'It would be better not; but if you do,

I advise you to go to St. Catherine.' 'Where is that?' 'Just opposite you.' There was a silence. Then I said, 'When shall I see you again, monsieur?' 'When I have your permission to come.' 'Do you need it?' 'Certainly, as yet I am a stranger to you.' 'Monsieur,' said I, half frightened at this unnatural submission, 'you can return when you like, or when you think you have anything important to communicate.'

"'Thanks, madame,' said he, 'I will use your permission, but not abuse it. I know you do not love me, and I will not abuse a situation which forces you to receive me. You will, I trust, gradually become accustomed to the thought, and be willing, when the moment shall arrive, to become my wife.' 'Monsieur,' said I, 'I appreciate your delicacy and frankness. I will use the same frankness. I had a prejudice against you, which I trust that time will cure.' 'Permit me,' said he, 'to partake this anticipation and live in the hopes of that happy moment.' Then bowing respectfully, he went out."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARRIAGE.

"A STRANGE man," said Bussy.

"Yes, is he not, monsieur? When he was gone I felt sadder and more frightened than ever. This icy respect, this ironical obedience, this repressed passion, which now and then showed itself in his voice, frightened me more than a will firmly expressed, and which I could have opposed, would have done. The next day was Sunday; I had never in my life missed divine service, so I took a thick veil and went to St. Catherine's, followed by Gertrude, and no one seemed to remark us.

"The next day the count came to announce to me that the duc had fulfilled his promise, and had obtained for him the place of chief huntsman, which had been promised to M. de St. Luc. A week passed thus: the count came twice to see me, and always preserved the same cold and submissive manner. The next Sunday I went again to the church. Imprudently, in the midst of my prayers, I raised my veil. I was praying earnestly for my father, when Gertrude touched me on the arm. I raised my head, and saw with terror M. le Duc d'Anjou leaning against the column, and looking earnestly at me. A man stood by him."

"It was Aurilly," said Bussy.

"Yes, that was the name that Gertrude told me afterward. I drew my veil quickly over my face, but it was too late: he had seen me, and if he had not recognized me, at least my resemblance to her whom he believed dead had struck him. Uneasy, I left the church, but found him standing at the door, and he offered to me the holy water as I passed. I feigned not to see him, and went on. We soon discovered that we were followed. Had I known anything of Paris, I would have attempted to lead them wrong, but I knew no more of it than from the church to the house, nor did I know any one of whom I could ask a quarter of an hour's hospitality; not a friend, and only one protector, whom I feared more than an enemy."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" cried Bussy, "why did not Heaven, or chance, throw me sooner in your path?"

Diana thanked the young man with a look.

"But pray go on," said Bussy, "I interrupt you, and yet I am dying to hear more."

"That evening M. de Monsoreau came. I did not know whether to tell him of what had happened, but he began, 'You asked me if you could go to mass, and I told you you were free, but that it would be better not to do so. You would not believe me: you went this morning to St. Catherine's, and by a fatality the prince was there and saw you.' 'It is true, monsieur; but I do not know if he recognized me.' 'Your face struck him; your resemblance to the woman he regrets appeared to him extraordinary, he followed you home, and made inquiries, but learned nothing, for no one knew anything.' 'Mon Dieu!' cried I. 'The duke is persevering,' said he. 'Oh! he will forget me, I hope.'

"'No one forgets you who has once seen you,' said he. 'I did all I could to forget you, and I have not succeeded.'

And the first passionate look that I had seen flashed from the eyes of the count. I was more terrified by it than I had been by the sight of the prince. I remained mute. 'What will you do?' asked the count. 'Can I not change my abode—go to the other end of Paris, or, better still, return to Anjou?' 'It will be useless; the duke is a terrible bloodhound, and now he is on your track, he will follow you wherever you go till he finds you.' 'Oh! mon Dieu! you frighten me.' 'I tell you the simple truth.' 'Then what do you advise me to do?' 'Alas!' said he, with a bitter irony, 'I am a man of poor imagination. I had formed a plan, but it does not suit you; I can find no other.' 'But the danger is perhaps less pressing than you imagine.'

"'The future will show us, madame,' said the count, rising. 'I can but add that the Comtesse de Monsoreau would have the less to fear from the prince, as my new post places me under the direct protection of the court.' I only replied by a sigh. He smiled bitterly, and as he went downstairs I heard him giving vent to oaths. The next day, when Gertrude went out, she was accosted by a young man whom she recognized as the one who had accompanied the prince, but she remained obstinately silent to all his questions. This meeting inspired me with profound terror; I feared that M. de Monsoreau would not come, and that they would invade the house in his absence. I sent for him, and he came at once. I told him all about the young man, whom I described.

"'It was Aurilly;' he said, 'and what did Gertrude answer?' 'She did not answer at all.' 'She was wrong,' said he. 'Why?' 'We must gain time.' 'Time?' 'Yes, I am now dependent on the Duc d'Anjou; in a fortnight, in a week perhaps, he will be in my power. We must deceive him to get him to wait.' 'Mon Dieu!' 'Certainly; hope will make him patient. A complete refusal will push him to extremities.' 'Monsieur, write to my father; he will throw himself at the feet of the king. He will have pity on an old man.' 'That is according to the king's humor, and whether he be for the time friendly or hostile to the duke. Besides, it would take six days for a messenger to reach your father, and six days for him to come here. In twelve days, f we do not stop him, the duke will have done all he can do.'

"'And how to stop him?' I cried. A smile passed over the lips of M. de Monsoreau at this first appeal to his protection. 'Madame,' said he, 'will you permit me to pass two or three hours in your room? I may be seen going out, and would rather wait till dark.' I signed him to sit down. We conversed; he was clever and had traveled much, and at the end of the time I understood, better than I had ever done before, the influence he had obtained over my father. When it grew dark, he rose and took leave. Gertrude and I then approached the window, and could distinctly see two men examining the house. The next day, Gertrude, when she went out, found the same young man in the same place. He spoke to her again, and this time she answered him. On the following day she told him that I was the widow of a counselor, who, being poor, lived in retirement. He tried to learn more, but could extract nothing further from her. The next day, Aurilly, who seemed to doubt her story, spoke of Anjou, of Beauge, and Meridor. Gertrude declared these names to be perfectly unknown to her. Then he avowed that he came from the Duc d'Anjou, who had seen and fallen in love with me; then came magnificent offers for both of us, for her, if she would introduce the prince into my house, and for me, if I would receive him.

"Every evening M. de Monsoreau came, to hear what was going on, and remained from eight o'clock to midnight, and it was evident that his anxiety was great. On Saturday evening he arrived pale and agitated.

"'You must promise to receive the duke on Tuesday or Wednesday,' said he. 'Promise! and why?' 'Because he has made up his mind to come in, and he is just now on the best terms with the king; we have nothing to expect from him.'

'But before then will anything happen to help me?' 'I hope so. I expect from day to day the event which is to place the duke in my power. But to-morrow I must leave you, and must go to Monsoreau.' 'Must you?' cried I, with a mixture of joy and terror. 'Yes, I have there a rendezvous which is indispensable to bring about the event of which I speak.' 'But if you fail, what are we to do?' 'What can I do against a prince, if I have no right to protect you, but yield to bad fortune?'

"'Oh! my father! my father!' cried I. The count looked at me. 'What have you to reproach me with?' said he. 'Nothing, on the contrary.' 'Have I not been a devoted friend, and as respectful as a brother?' 'You have behaved throughout like a gallant man.' 'Had I not your promise?' 'Yes.' 'Have I once recalled it to you?' 'No.' 'And yet you prefer to be the mistress of the duke to being my wife?' 'I do not say so, monsieur.' 'Then decide.' 'I have decided.' 'To be Countess of Monsoreau?' 'Rather than the mistress of the duke.' 'The alternative is flattering. But, meanwhile, let Gertrude gain time until Tuesday.' The next day Gertrude went out, but did not meet Aurilly. We felt more frightened at his absence than we had done at his presence. Night came, and we were full of terror. We were alone and feeble, and for the first time I felt my injustice to the count."

"Oh! madame!" cried Bussy, "do not be in a hurry to think so, his conduct conceals some mystery, I believe."

"All was quiet," continued Diana, "until eleven o'clock. Then five men came out of the Rue St. Antoine, and hid themselves by the Hotel des Tournelles. We began to tremble; were they there for us? However, they remained quiet, and a quarter of an hour passed; then we saw two other men approach. By the moonlight Gertrude recognized Aurilly. 'Alas! mademoiselle; it is they,' cried she. 'Yes,' cried I, trembling, 'and the five others are to help them.' 'But they must force the door,' said Gertrude, 'perhaps the neighbors will come and help us.' 'Oh! no, they do not know us, and they will not fight against the duke. Alas! Gertrude, I fear we have no real defender but the count.' 'Well! then, why do you always refuse to marry him?' I sighed."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARRIAGE.

"THE two men approached the window. We gently opened it a little way, and heard one say, 'Are you sure it is here?' 'Yes, monseigneur, quite sure,' said the other. 'It is the fifth house from the corner of the Rue St. Paul.' 'And you are sure of the key?' 'I took the pattern of the lock.' I seized Gertrude's arm in terror. 'And once inside,' he went on, 'the servant will admit us; your highness has in your pocket a golden key as good as this one.' 'Open, then.' We heard the key turn in the lock, but all at once the ambushed men rushed forward, crying, 'A mort! à mort!' I could not understand this, only I saw that unexpected help had come to us, and I fell on my knees, thanking Heaven. But the prince had only to name himself when every sword went back into the scabbard, and every foot drew back."

"Yes, yes," said Bussy, "it was for me they came, not for the prince."

"However, this attack caused the prince to retire, and the five gentlemen went back to their hiding-place. It was evident that the danger was over for that night, but we were too unquiet to go to bed. Soon we saw a man on horseback appear, and then the five gentlemen immediately rushed on him. You know the rest, as the gentleman was yourself."

"On the contrary, madame, I know only that I fought and then fainted."

"It is useless to say," continued Diana, with a blush, "the interest that we took in the combat so unequal, but so valiantly sustained. Each blow drew from us a shudder, a cry, and a prayer. We saw your horse fall, and we thought you lost, but it was not so; the brave Bussy merited his reputation. At last, surrounded, menaced on all sides, you retreated like a lion, facing your foes, and came to lean against our door; the same idea came to

both of us, to go down and open to you, and we ran toward the staircase; but we had barricaded the door, and it took us some minutes to move the furniture, and as we arrived on the stairs, we heard the door shut. We stopped, and looked at each other, wondering who had entered. Soon we heard steps, and a man appeared, who tottered, threw up his arms, and fell on the first step. It was evident that he was not pursued, but had put the door, so luckily left open by the duke, between him and his adversaries. In any case we had nothing to fear; it was he who needed our help. Gertrude ran and fetched a lamp, and we found you had fainted, and carried you to the bed. Gertrude had heard of a wonderful cure made by a young doctor in the Rue Beautrellis, and she offered to go and fetch him. 'But,' said I, 'he might betray us.' 'I will take precautions,' said she. She took money and the key, and I remained alone near you, and—praying for you."

"Alas!" said Bussy, "I did not know all my happiness, madame."

"In a quarter of an hour Gertrude returned, bringing the young doctor with his eyes bandaged."

"Yes, it was at that moment I recovered my senses and saw your portrait, and thought I saw you enter," said Bussy.

"I did so; my anxiety was stronger than my prudence. The doctor examined your wound and answered for your life."

"All that remained in my mind," said Bussy, "like a dream, and yet something told me," added he, laying his hand upon his heart, "that it was real."

"When the surgeon had dressed your wound, he drew from his pocket a little bottle containing a red liquor, of which he put some drops on your lips. He told me it was to counteract the fever and produce sleep, and said that the only thing then was to keep you quiet. Gertrude then bandaged his eyes again and took him back to the Rue Beautrellis, but she fancied he counted the steps."

"He did so, madame."

"This supposition frightened us. We feared he would betray us, and we wished to get rid of every trace of the hospitality we had shown you. I gathered up my courage; it was two o'clock, and the streets were deserted; Gertrude was strong, and I aided her, and between us we carried you to the Temple. Luckily we met no one, but when we returned, I fainted with emotion."

"Oh! madame!" cried Bussy, "how can I ever repay you for what you have done for me?"

There was a moment's silence, and they heard the clock of St. Catherine's church strike. "Two o'clock," cried Diana, "and you here!"

"Oh! madame, do not send me away without telling me all. Suppose that God had given you a brother, and tell this brother what he can do for his sister."

"Alas! nothing now; it is too late."

"What happened the next day?" said Bussy; "what did you do on that day when I thought constantly of you, without feeling sure if you were not a vision of my delirium?"

"During that day, Gertrude went out, and met Aurilly. He was more pressing than ever. He said nothing of the night before, but asked for an interview for his master. Gertrude appeared to consent, but she asked until the Wednesday—that is to-day—to decide. Aurilly promised that his master would wait until then. That evening, M. de Monsoreau returned. We told him all, except about you.

"'Yes,' said he, 'I heard of all this. Then he has a key.' 'Can we not change the lock?' 'He will get another key.' 'Put on bolts.' 'He will come with ten men and force the door.' 'But the event which was to give you full power over him?' 'Is postponed indefinitely.' I stood in despair. 'Monsieur,' said I, 'the duke has promised to wait till Wednesday; I ask you to wait till Tuesday.' 'Tuesday evening I will be here, madame,' and without another word he went out. I followed him with my eyes, but instead of going away, he stood in the corner by the Hotel des Tournelles, and seemed determined to watch me all night. Every proof of devotion he gave me was like a knife in my heart. The two days

passed rapidly, but what I suffered it is impossible to describe. When Tuesday evening came, I felt exhausted, and all emotion seemed dead within me.

"Gertrude went to the window. 'Madame,' cried she, 'four men! I see four men! They approach, they open the door—they enter! It is, doubtless, the duke and his followers.' For an answer, I drew my poniard, and placed it near me on the table, 'See,' said I. An instant after, Gertrude returned, 'It is the count,' said she. He entered. 'Gertrude tells me,' said he, 'that you took me for the duke, and were ready to kill yourself.' It was the first time I had ever seen him moved. 'Gertrude was wrong to tell you,' said I. 'You know that I am not alone.' 'Gertrude saw four men.' 'You know who they are?' 'I presume one is a priest, and the others witnesses.' 'Then, you are ready to become my wife?' 'It was so agreed; only I stipulated that, except in an urgent case, I would only marry you in the presence of my father.' 'I remember; but do you not think the case urgent?' 'Yes, and the priest may marry us, but, until I have seen my father, I will be your wife only in name.'

"The count frowned, and bit his lips.

"'I do not wish to coerce you,' said he; 'you are free; but look here.' I went to the window, and saw a man wrapped in a cloak, who seemed trying to get into the house."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" cried Bussy; "and this was yesterday?"

"Yes, about nine o'clock. Presently, another man, with a lantern, joined him. I thought it was the duke and his followers.

"'Now,' said M. de Monsoreau, 'shall I go or stay?' I hesitated a moment, in spite of my father's letter and of my given word, but those two men there—"

"Oh! unhappy that I am," cried Bussy, "it was I and Remy, the young doctor."

"You!" cried Diana.

"Yes, I; I, who, more and more convinced of the reality of my dream, sought for the house where I had been, and the woman, or rather angel, who had appeared to me. Oh! I am unfortunate. Then," continued he, after a pause, "you are his wife?"

"Since yesterday."

There was a fresh silence.

"But," said Diana at last, "how did you enter this house?"

Bussy silently showed his key.

"A key! where did you get it?"

"Had not Gertrude promised the prince to enter to-night? He had seen M. de Monsoreau here, and also myself, and fearing a snare, sent me to find out."

"And you accepted this mission?"

"It was my only method of penetrating to you. Will you reproach me for having sought at once the greatest joy and the greatest grief of my life?"

"Yes, for it is better that you should see me no more, and forget me."

"No, madame; God has brought me to you, to deliver you from the toils in which your enemies have taken you. I vow my life to you. You wish for news of your father?"

"Oh, yes! for, in truth, I know not what has become of him."

"Well, I charge myself with finding out; only think of him who henceforth will live but for you."

"But this key?"

"This key I restore to you, for I will receive it only from your hands; but I pledge you my word as a gentleman, that never sister could trust in a brother more devoted and respectful."

"I trust to the word of the brave Bussy. Here, monsieur," and she gave back the key.

"Madame, in a fortnight we will know more;" and, saluting Diana with a respect mingled with love and sadness, Bussy took leave. Diana listened to his retreating steps with tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW HENRI III. TRAVELED, AND HOW LONG IT TOOK HIM TO GET FROM PARIS TO FONTAINEBLEAU.

THE sun, which shone four or five hours after the events which we have just recorded had taken place, saw, by his pale light, Henri III. set off for Fontainebleau, where a grand chase was projected. A

crowd of gentlemen, mounted on good horses and wrapped in their fur cloaks, then a number of pages, after them lackeys, and then Swiss, followed the royal litter. This litter, drawn by eight mules richly caparisoned, was a large machine, about fifteen feet long and eight wide, on four wheels, furnished inside with cushions and curtains of silk brocade. In difficult places they substituted for the mules an indefinite number of oxen.

This machine contained Henri III., his doctor, and his chaplain, Chicot, four of the king's favorites, a pair of large dogs, and a basket of little ones, which the king held on his knees, and which was suspended from his neck by a golden chain. From the roof hung a gilded cage containing turtle doves, quite white, with a black ring round their necks. Sometimes the collection was completed by the presence of two or three apes. Thus this litter was commonly termed the Noah's Ark.

Quelus and Maugiron employed themselves with plaiting ribbons, a favorite diversion of that time; and Chicot amused himself by making anagrams on the names of all the courtiers. Just as they passed the Place Maubert, Chicot rushed out of the litter, and went to kneel down before a house of good appearance.

"Oh!" cried the king, "if you kneel, let it be before the crucifix in the middle of the street and not before the house. What do you mean by it?"

But Chicot, without attending, cried out in a loud voice:

"Mon Dieu! I recognize it, I shall always recognize it—the house where I suffered! I have never prayed for vengeance on M. de Mayenne, author of my martyrdom, nor on Nicholas David, his instrument. No, Chicot is patient, Chicot can wait, although it is now six years that this debt has been running on, and in seven years the interest is doubled. May, then, my patience last another year, so that instead of fifty blows of a stirrup-leather which I received in this house by the orders of this assassin of a Lorraine prince, and which drew a pint of blood, I may owe a hundred blows and two pints of blood! Amen, so be it!"

"Amen!" said the king.

Chicot then returned to the litter, amid the wondering looks of the spectators.

"Why, Chicot, what does all this mean?" said the king.

"Sire, it means that Chicot is like the fox—that he licks the stones where his blood fell, until against those very stones he crushes the heads of those who spilled it."

"Explain yourself."

"Sire, in that house lived a girl whom Chicot loved, a good and charming creature, and a lady. One evening when he went to see her, a certain prince, who had also fallen in love with her, had him seized and beaten, so that Chicot was forced to jump out of window; and as it was a miracle that he was not killed, each time he passes the house he kneels down and thanks God for his escape."

"You were, then, well beaten, my poor Chicot?"

"Yes, sire, and yet not as much as I wished."

"Why—for your sins?"

"No, for those of M. de Mayenne."

"Oh! I understand; your intention is to render to Cæsar—"

"Not to Cæsar, sire—Cæsar is the great general, the valiant warrior, the eldest brother, who wishes to be king of France. No, you must settle with him; pay your debts, and I will pay mine."

Henri did not like to hear his cousin of Guise spoken of, and this made him serious. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at Juvisy and the great hotel of the "Cour de France."

Chicot, looking out of the litter, saw at the door of the hotel several men wrapped in cloaks. In the midst of them was a short stout person, whose large hat almost covered his face. They went in quickly on seeing the litter, but not before the look of this person had had time to excite Chicot's attention. Therefore he jumped out, and asking a page for his horse, which was being led, let the royal litter go on to Essones, where the king was to sleep, while he remained behind, and, cautiously peeping in through a window, saw the men whom he had noticed

sitting inside. He then entered the hotel, went into the opposite room, asked for a bottle of wine, and placed himself so that, although he could not be seen, no one could pass by without his seeing them.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "shall I be forced to make my payment sooner than I expected?"

Soon Chicot found that by keeping the door open he could both see into the room and hear what was said.

"Gentlemen," said the short fat man to his companions, "I think it is time to set out; the last lackey of the cortege is out of sight, and I believe now that the road is safe."

"Perfectly so, monseigneur," replied a voice which made Chicot tremble, and which came from the mouth of a person as tall as the other was short, as pale as he was red, and as obsequious as he was arrogant.

"Ah! M. Nicolas," said Chicot, "tu quoque, that is good. It will be odd if I let you slip this time!"

Then the short man came out, paid the bill, and, followed by the others, took the road to Paris. Chicot followed them at a distance. They entered by the Porte St. Antoine, and entered the Hotel Guise. Chicot waited outside a full hour, in spite of cold and hunger. At last the door reopened, but, instead of seven cavaliers wrapped in their cloaks, seven monks came out, with their hoods over their faces, and carrying immense rosaries.

"Oh!" said Chicot, "is, then, the Hotel Guise so embalmed in sanctity that wolves change into lambs only by entering it? This becomes more and more interesting."

And he followed the monks as he had followed the cavaliers, for he believed them to be the same.

The monks passed over the bridge of Notre-Dame, crossed the city and the petit pont, and went up the Rue St. Genevieve.

"Oh!" said Chicot, as he passed the house where he had kneeled in the morning, "are we returning to Fontainebleau? In that case I have made a round."

However, the monks stopped at the door of the Abbey of St. Genevieve, in the porch of which stood another monk, who examined every one's hand.

"Why," said Chicot, "it seems that to be admitted to-night into the abbey, one must have clean hands!"

Then he saw, with astonishment, monks appear from every street leading to the abbey, some alone, some walking in pairs, but all coming to the abbey.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "is there a general chapter at the abbey to-night? I have never seen one, and I should like it much."

The monks entered, showing their hands, or something in them, and passed on.

"I should like to go also," thought Chicot; "but for that I want two things —a monk's robe, for I see no layman here, and then this mysterious thing which they show to the porter, for certainly they show something. Ah, Brother Gorenflot, if you were here!"

The monks continued to arrive, till it seemed as if half Paris had taken the frock.

"There must be something extraordinary to-night," thought Chicot. "I will go and find Gorenflot at the Corne d'Abondance; he will be at supper."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROTHER GORENFLOT.

To the beautiful day had succeeded a beautiful evening, only, as the day had been cold, the evening was still colder. It was one of those frosts which make the lights in the windows of a hotel look doubly tempting. Chicot first entered the dining-room, and looked around him, but not finding there the man he sought for, went familiarly down to the kitchen. The master of the establishment was superintending a frying-pan full of whitings. At the sound of Chicot's step he turned.

"Ah! it is you, monsieur," said he, "good-evening, and a good appetite to you."

"Thanks for the wish, but you know I cannot bear to eat alone."

"If necessary, monsieur, I will sup with you."

"Thanks, my dear host, but though I know you to be an excellent companion, I seek for some one else."

"Brother Gorenflot, perhaps?"

"Just so; has he begun supper?"

"No, not yet; but you must make haste nevertheless, for in five minutes he will have finished."

"Monsieur!" cried Chicot, striking his head.

"Monsieur, it is Friday, and the beginning of Lent."

"Well, and what then?" said Chicot, who did not hold a high opinion of Gorenflot's religious austerity.

Boutromet shrugged his shoulders. "Decidedly, something must be wrong," said Chicot, "five minutes for Gorenflot's supper! I am destined to see wonders to-day."

Chicot then advanced toward a small private room, pushed open the door, and saw within the worthy monk, who was turning negligently on his plate a small portion of spinach, which he tried to render more savory by the introduction into it of some cheese. Brother Gorenflot was about thirty-eight years of age and five feet high. However, what he wanted in height he made up in breadth, measuring nearly three feet in diameter from shoulder to shoulder, which, as every one knows, is equal to nine feet of circumference. Between these Hurculean shoulders rose a neck of which the muscles stood out like cords. Unluckily this neck partook of the same proportions; it was short and thick, which at any great emotion might render Brother Gorenflot liable to apoplexy. But knowing this, perhaps, he never gave way to emotions, and was seldom so disturbed as he was when Chicot entered his room.

"Ah, my friend! what are you doing?" cried Chicot, looking at the vegetables and at a glass filled with water just colored with a few drops of wine.

"You see, my brother, I sup," replied Gorenflot in a powerful voice.

"You call that supper, Gorenflot! Herbs and cheese?"

"We are in the beginning of Lent, brother; we must think of our souls," replied Gorenflot, raising his eyes to heaven.

Chicot looked astounded; he had so often seen Gorenflot feast in a different manner during Let.

"Our souls!" said he; "and what the devil have herbs and water to do with them?"

"We are forbidden to eat meat on Wednesdays and Fridays."

"But when did you breakfast?"

"I have not breakfasted, my brother," said the monk.

"Not breakfasted! Then what have you done?"

"Composed a discourse," said Gorenflot proudly.

"A discourse, and what for?"

"To deliver this evening at the abbey."

"That is odd."

"And I must be quick and go there, or perhaps my audience will grow impatient."

Chicot thought of the infinite number of monks he had seen going to the abbey, and wondered why Gorenflot, whom certainly he had never thought eloquent, had been chosen to preach before M. de Mayenne and the numerous assemblage.

"When are you to preach?" said he.

"At half-past nine."

"Good; it is still a quarter to nine, you can give me a few minutes. Ventre de biche! we have not dined together for a week."

"It is not our fault, but I know that your duties keep you near our King Henri III., while my duties fill up my time."

"Yes, but it seems to me that is so much the more reason why we should be merry when we do meet."

"Yes, I am merry," said Gorenflot, with a piteous look, "but still I must leave you."

"At least, finish your supper."

Gorenflot looked at the spinach, and sighed, then at the water, and turned away his head.

"Do you remember," said Chicot, "the little dinner at the Porte Montmartre, where, while the king was scourging himself and others, we devoured a teal from the marshes of the Grange-Bateliere, with

a sauce made with crabs, and we drank that nice Burgundy wine; what do you call it?"

"It is a wine of my country, La Romanée."

"Yes, yes, it was the milk you sucked as a baby, worthy son of Noah."

"It was good," said Gorenflot, "but there is better."

"So says Claude Boutromet, who pretends that he has in his cellar fifty bottles to which that is paltry."

"It is true."

"True, and yet you drink that abominable red water. Fie!" And Chicot, taking the glass, threw the contents out of window.

"There is a time for all, my brother," said Gorenflot, "and wine is good when one has only to praise God after it, but water is better when one has a discourse to pronounce."

"Opinions differ, for I, who have also a discourse to pronounce, am going to ask for a bottle of Romanée. What do you advise me to take with it, Gorenflot?"

"Not these herbs, they are not nice." Chicot, seizing the plate, threw it after the water, and then cried, "Maitre Claude." The host appeared.

"M. Claude, bring me two bottles of your Romanée, which you call so good."

"Why two bottles," said Gorenflot, "as I do not drink it?"

"Oh! if you did I would have four or six, but if I drink alone, two will do for me."

"Indeed; two bottles are reasonable, and if you eat no meat with it, your confessor will have nothing to reproach you with."

"Oh, of course not; meat on a Friday in Lent!" And going to the larder, he drew out a fine capon.

"What are you doing, brother?" said Gorenflot, following his movements with interest.

"You see I am taking this carp."

"Carp!" cried Gorenflot.

"Yes, a carp," said Chicot, showing him the tempting bird.

"And since when has a carp had a beak?"

"A beak! do you see a beak? I only see a nose."

"And wings?"

"Fins!"——"Feathers?"

"Scales, my dear Gorenflot, you are drunk."

"Drunk! I, who have only eaten spinach and drunk water?"

"Well, your spinach has overloaded your stomach, and your water has mounted to your head."

"Parbleu! here is our host, he shall decide."

"So be it, but first let him uncork the wine."

M. Boutromet uncorked a bottle and gave a glass to Chicot. Chicot swallowed and smacked his lips.

"Ah!" said he, "I have a bad memory, I cannot remember if it be better or worse than that at Montmartre. Here, my brother, enlighten me," said he, giving a little to the monk, who was looking on with eager eyes.

Gorenflot took the glass, and drank slowly the liquor it contained.

"It is the same wine," said he, "but I had too little to tell whether it be better or worse."

"But I want to know, and if you had not a sermon to preach, I would beg you to drink a little more."

"If it will give you pleasure, my brother."

Chicot half filled the monk's glass. Gorenflot drank it with great gravity.

"I pronounce it better," said he.

"You flatter our host."

"A good drinker ought, at the first draught, to recognize the wine, at the second, the quality, and, at the third, the age."

"Oh! I should like to know the age of this wine."

"Give me a few drops more, and I will tell you."

Chicot filled his glass. He drank it off, and then said, "1561."

"Right," cried Claude Boutromet, "it was 1561."

"Brother Gorenflot," cried Chicot, "they have beatified men at Rome who were worth less than you."

"A little habit," said Gorenflot modestly.

"And talent; for I flatter myself I have the habit, and I could not do it. But what are you about?"

"Going to my assembly."

"Without eating a piece of my carp?"

"Ah! true; you know still less of eating than drinking. M. Boutromet, what is the name of this animal?"

The innkeeper looked astonished. "A capon," said he.

"A capon!" cried Chicot, with an air of consternation.

"Yes, and a fine one."

"Well!" said Gorenflot triumphantly.

"Well! it seems I was wrong, but as I wish to eat this capon, and yet not sin, be so kind, brother, as to throw a few drops of water upon it, and christen it a carp."——"Ah! ah!"

"Yes, I pray you, save me from mortal sin."

"So be it," cried Gorenflot, "but there is no water."

"Oh! the intention is all; baptize it with wine, my brother; the animal will be less Catholic but quite as good." And Chicot refilled the monk's glass. The first bottle was finished.

"In the name of Bacchus, Momus, and Comus, trinity of the great saint Pantagruel, I baptize thee, carp," said Gorenflot.

"Now," said Chicot, "to the health of the newly baptized; may it be cooked to perfection, and may M. Boutromet add to the excellent qualities which it has received from nature."

"To his health," cried Gorenflot, interrupting a hearty laugh to swallow his wine.

"M. Claude, put this carp at once on the spit, cover it with fresh butter, with shalots in it, and put some toast in the frying-pan, and serve it hot." Gorenflot approved with a motion of his head.

"Now, M. Boutromet, some sardines and a tunny fish, meanwhile; it is Lent, and I wish to make a maigre dinner. And let me have two more bottles of wine."

The smell of the cookery began to mount to the brain of the monk. Yet he made a last effort to rise.

"Then you leave me, after all?" said Chicot.

"I must," said Gorenflot, raising his eyes to heaven.

"It is very imprudent of you to go to pronounce a discourse fasting."

"Why?"

"Because your strength will fail you. Galen has said it. *Pulmo hominis facile deficit.*"

"Alas! yes."

"You see, then?"

"Luckily, I have zeal."

"Ah! but that is not enough; I advise you to eat some sardines, and drink a little of this nectar."

"A single sardine, then, and one glass." Chicot gave him the sardine, and passed him the bottle. He himself took care to keep sober.

"I feel myself less feeble," said Gorenflot.

"Oh! you must feel quite strong before you go, and so I advise you to eat the fins of the carp." And as they entered with the pullet, Chicot cut off a leg and thigh, which Gorenflot soon dispatched.

"What a delicious fish!" said Gorenflot. Chicot cut off the other leg and gave it to Gorenflot, while he ate the wings.

"And famous wine," said he, uncorking another bottle.

Having once commenced, Gorenflot could not stop. His appetite was enormous; he finished the bird, and then called to Boutromet. "M. Claude," said he, "I am hungry; did you not offer me an omelette just now?"

"Certainly."

"Well, bring it."

"In five minutes."

"Ah!" said Gorenflot, "now I feel in force; if the omelette were here, I could eat it at a mouthful, and I swallow this wine at a gulp." And he swallowed a quarter of the third bottle.

"Ah! you were ill before."

"I was foolish, friend; that cursed discourse weighed on my mind; I have been thinking of it for days."

"It ought to be magnificent."

"Splendid."

DIANA DE MERIDOR.

"Tell me some of it while we wait for the omelette."

"No, no; not a sermon at table."

"We have beautiful discourses at the court, I assure you."

"About what?"

"About virtue."

"Ah! yes, he is a very virtuous man, our King Henri III."

"I do not know if he be virtuous; but I know that I have never seen anything there to make me blush."

"You blush!"

At this moment M. Boutromet entered with the omelette and two more bottles.

"Bring it here," cried the monk, with a smile, which showed his thirty-two teeth.

"But, friend, I thought you had a discourse to pronounce."

"It is here," cried Gorenflot, striking his forehead.

"At half-past nine."

"I lied; it was ten."

"Ten! I thought the abbey shut at nine."

"Let it shut; I have a key."

"A key of the abbey!"

"Here, in my pocket."

"Impossible; I know the monastic rules. They would not give the key to a simple monk."

"Here it is," said Gorenflot, showing a piece of money.

"Oh, money! you corrupt the porter to go in when you please, wretched sinner! But what strange money!"

"An effigy of the heretic, with a hole through his heart."

"Yes, I see it is a tester of the Béarn king's, and here is a hole."

"A blow with a dagger. Death to the heretic. He who does it is sure of Paradise."

"He is not yet drunk enough;" so thought Chicot; and he filled his glass again.

"To the mass!" cried Gorenflot, drinking it off.

Chicot remembered the porter looking at the hands of the monks, and said:

"Then, if you show this to the porter—"

"I enter."

"Without difficulty?"

"As this wine into my stomach." And the monk absorbed a new dose.

"And you pronounce your discourse?"

"And I pronounce my discourse. I arrive—do you hear? The assembly is numerous and select. There are barons, counts, and dukes."

"And even princes?"

"And even princes. I enter humbly among the faithful of the Union—"

"The Union—what does that mean?"

"I enter; they call Brother Gorenflot, and I advance—"

At these words the monk rose. "And I advance," continued he, trying to do so, but at the first step he rolled on the floor.

"Bravo!" cried Chicot; "you advance, you salute the audience, and say—"

"No, it is my friends who say, Brother Gorenflot—a fine name for a leaguer, is it not?"

"A leaguer," thought Chicot; "what truths is this wine going to bring out?"

"Then I begin." And the monk rose, and leaned against the wall.

"You begin," said Chicot, holding him up.

"I begin, 'My brothers, it is a good day for the faith, a very good day, my brothers; it is a very good day for the faith.'"

After this, as Chicot loosed his hold, Gorenflot fell full length again on the floor, and before many minutes a loud snoring was heard.

"Good," said Chicot, "he is in for twelve hours' sleep. I can easily undress him."

He then untied the monk's robe, and pulled it off; then rolled Gorenflot in the tablecloth, and covered his head with a napkin, and hiding the monk's frock under his cloak, passed into the kitchen.

"M. Boutromet," said he, "here is for our supper, and for my horse; and pray do not wake the worthy Brother Gorenflot, who sleeps sound."

"No, no; be easy, M. Chicot."

Then Chicot ran to the Rue St. Etienne, put on the monk's robe, took the tester in his hand, and at a quarter to ten present-

ed himself, not without a beating heart, at the wicket of the Abbey St. Genevieve.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW CHICOT FOUND OUT THAT IT WAS EASIER TO GO IN THAN OUT OF THE ABBEY.

CHICOT, from the cloak and other things under the monk's robe, looked much larger across the shoulders than usual. His beard was of the same color as Gorenflot's, and he had so often amused himself with mimicking the monk's voice and manner of speaking that he could do it perfectly. Now, every one knows that the beard and the voice are the only things which are recognizable from under the depths of a monk's hood. Chicot exhibited his coin, and was admitted without difficulty, and then followed two other monks to the chapel of the convent. In this chapel, built in the eleventh century, the choir was raised nine or ten feet above the rest of the building, and you mounted into it by two lateral staircases, while an iron door between them led from the nave to the crypt, into which you had to descend again. In this choir there was a portrait of St. Genevieve, and on each side of the altar were statues of Clovis and Clotilda.

Three lamps only lighted the chapel, and the imperfect light gave a greater solemnity to the scene. Chicot was glad to find that he was not the last, for three monks entered after in gray robes, and placed themselves in front of the altar. Soon after, a little monk, doubtless a lad belonging to the choir, came and spoke to one of these monks, who then said, aloud—

"We are now one hundred and thirty-six."

Then a great noise of bolts and bars announced that the door was being closed. The three monks were seated in arm-chairs, like judges. The one who had spoken before now rose and said—

"Brother Monsoreau. what news do you bring to the Union from the province of Anjou?"

Two things made Chicot start, the first was the voice of the speaker, the second the name of Monsoreau, known to the court only the last few days. A tall monk crossed the assembly, and placed himself in a large chair, behind the shadow of which Chicot had kept himself.

"My brothers," said a voice which Chicot recognized at once as that of the chief huntsman, "the news from Anjou is not satisfactory; not that we fail there in sympathy, but in representatives. The progress of the Union there had been confided to the Baron de Meridor, but he, in despair at the recent death of his daughter, has, in his grief, neglected the affairs of the League, and we cannot at present count on him. As for myself, I bring three new adherents to the association. The council must judge whether these three, for whom I answer, as for myself, ought to be admitted into the Union."

A murmur of applause followed, and as Monsoreau regained his seat—"Brother la Huriere," cried the same monk, "tell us what you have done in the city of Paris."

A man now took the chair and said, "My brothers, you know I am devoted to the Catholic faith, and I have given proofs of this devotion on the great day of its triumph. Yes, my brothers, I glory in saying that I was one of the faithful of our great Henri de Guise, and that I followed his orders strictly. I have now noted all the heretics of the Quartier St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where I shall hold the hotel of the Belle Etoile, at your service, my brothers. Now, although I no longer thirst for the blood of heretics as formerly, I do not delude myself as to the real object of the holy Union which we are forming. If I am not deceived, brothers, the extinction of private heretics is not all we aim at. We wish to be sure that we shall never be governed by a heretic prince. Now, my friends, what is our situation? Charles IX., who was zealous, died without children; Henri III. will probably do the same, and there remains only the Duc d'Anjou, who not only has no children either, but seems cold toward us."

"What makes you accuse the prince thus?" said the monk who always spoke.

"Because he has not joined us."

"Who tells you so, since there are new adherents?"

"It is true; I will wait; but after him, who is mortal, and has no children, to whom will the crown fall? To the most ferocious Huguenot that can be imagined, to a renegade, a Nebuchadnezzar!" Here the acclamations were tremendous.

"To Henri of Béarn," continued he, "against whom this association is chiefly directed—to Henri, who the people at Pau, or Tarbes, think is occupied with his love affairs, but who is in Paris."

"In Paris! impossible!" cried many voices.

"He was here on the night when Madame de Sauve was assassinated, and perhaps is here still." —— "Death to the Béarnais!" cried several.

"Yes, doubtless, and if he came to lodge at the Belle Etoile, I answer for him; but he will not come. One does not catch a fox twice in the same hole. He will lodge with some friend, for he has friends. The important thing is to know them. Our union is holy, our league is loyal, consecrated and blessed by the pope; therefore I demand that it be no longer kept secret, but that we go into the houses and canvass the citizens. Those who sign will be our friends, the others our enemies, and if a second St. Bartholomew come, which seems to the faithful to be more necessary daily, we shall know how to separate the good from the wicked."

Thunders of acclamation followed.

When they were calm, the monk who always spoke said—

"The proposition of Brother la Huriere, whom the union thanks for his zeal, will be taken into consideration by the superior council."

La Huriere bowed, amid fresh applause.

"Ah! ah!" thought Chicot, "I begin to see clearly into all this. The Guises are forming a nice little party, and some fine morning Henri will find that he has nothing left, and will be politely invited to enter a monastery. But what will they do with the Duc d'Anjou?"

"Brother Gorenflot," then cried the monk.

No one replied.

"Brother Gorenflot," cried the little monk, in a voice which made Chicot start; for it sounded like a woman's. However, he rose, and speaking like the monk, said—

"Here I am; I was plunged in profound meditation." He feared not to reply, for the members had been counted, and therefore the absence of a member would have provoked an examination. Therefore, without hesitation, he mounted the chair and began.

"My brothers, you know that I purvey for the convent, and have the right of entering every dwelling. I use this privilege for the good of religion. My brothers," continued he, remembering Gorenflot's beginning, "this day, which unites us, is a good one for the faith. Let us speak freely, my brothers, since we are in the house of God.

"What is the kingdom of France? A body. *'Omnis civitas corpus est.'* What is the first requisite of a body? Good health. How do we preserve this? By prudent bleedings at times. Now it is evident that the enemies of our religion are too strong; we must therefore once more bleed that great body we call society. This is what is constantly said to me by the faithful, who give me ham, eggs, or money for the convent."

Several murmurs of approbation interrupted Chicot, then he went on.

"Some may object that the church abhors blood. But they do not say what blood, and I wager that it is not the blood of heretics it abhors. And then another argument; I said, 'the church;' but are we the church? Brother Monsoreau, who spoke so well just now, has, I doubt not, his huntsman's knife in his belt. Brother la Huriere manages the spit; I, myself, who speak to you—I, Jacques Gorenflot, have carried the musket in Champagne. It now remains to us to speak of our chiefs, of whom it seems to me, poor monk as I am, that there is something to say. Certainly, it is very well and prudent to come at night under a monk's robe, to hear Brother Gorenflot preach; but it appears to me that their duties do not

stop there. So much prudence may make the Huguenots laugh. Let us play a part more worthy of the brave people we are. What do we want? The extinction of heresy. Well, that may be cried from the house-tops, it seems to me. Why not march in holy procession, displaying our good cause, and our good partisans, but not like the thieves, who keep looking round them to see if the watch is coming. Who is the man who will set the example? Well, it is I, Jacques Gorenflot; I, unworthy brother of the order of St. Genevieve, poor and humble purveyor of the convent. It shall be I, who with a cuirass on my back, a helmet on my head, and a musket on my shoulder, will march at the head of all good Catholics who will follow me. This I would do, were it only to make those chiefs blush, who, while defending the Church, hide, as if their cause was a bad one."

This speech, which corresponded with the sentiments of many there, was received with shouts of applause; and the more so, as up to this time Gorenflot had never shown any enthusiasm for the cause. However, it was not the plan of the chiefs to let this enthusiasm proceed. One of the monks spoke to the lad, who cried in his silvery voice, "My brothers, it is time to retire; the sitting is over."

The monks rose, all determined to insist on the procession at the next meeting. Many approached the chair to felicitate the author of this brilliant speech; but Chicot, fearful of being recognized, threw himself on his knees and buried his head in his hands, as if in prayer. They respected his devotions, and went toward the door. However, Chicot had missed his chief aim. What had made him quit the king was the sight of M. de Mayenne and Nicolas David, on both of whom he had, as we know, vowed vengeance; and although the duke was too great a man to be attacked openly, Nicolas David was not, and Chicot was so good a swordsman as to feel sure of success if he could but meet him. He therefore began to watch each monk as he went out, and perceived to his terror that each, on going out, had to show some sign again. Gorenflot had told him how to get in, but not how to get out again.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW CHICOT, FORCED TO REMAIN IN THE ABBEY, SAW AND HEARD THINGS VERY DANGEROUS TO SEE AND HEAR.

CHICOT hastened to get down from his chair, and to mix among the monks so as to discover, if possible, what signs they used. By peeping over their shoulders, he found out that it was a farthing, with a star cut in the middle. Our Gascon had plenty of farthings in his pocket, but unluckily none with a star in it. Of course, if when on coming to the door he was unable to produce the necessary signs, he would be suspected and examined. He gained the shade of a pillar, which stood at the corner of a confessional, and stood there wondering what he should do. An assistant cried, "Is every one out, the doors are about to be shut."

No one answered; Chicot peeped out and saw the chapel empty, with the exception of the three monks, who still kept their seats in front of the choir.

"Provided they do not shut the windows, it is all I ask," thought Chicot.

"Let us examine," said the young lad to the porter. Then the porter lifted a taper, and, followed by the young lad, began to make the tour of the church. There was not a moment to lose. Chicot softly opened the door of the confessional, slipped in, and shut the door after him. They passed close by him, and he could see them through the spaces of the sculpture.

"Diable!" thought he, "he cannot stay here all night, and once they are gone, I will pile chairs upon benches, Pelion on Ossa, and get out of the window. Ah! yes, but when I have done that, I shall be, not in the street, but in the court. I believe it will be better to pass the night in the confessional; Gorenflot's robe is warm."

"Extinguish the lamps," now cried the lad; and the porter, with an immense extinguisher, put out the lamps, and left the church dark, except for the rays of the moon, which shone through the windows. The clock struck twelve.

"Ventre de biche!" said Chicot, "Henri, if he were here, would be nicely frightened; but, luckily, I am less timid. Come, Chicot, my friend, good-night and sleep well."

Then Chicot pushed the inside bolt, made himself as comfortable as he could, and shut his eyes. He was just falling asleep, when he was startled by a loud stroke on a copper bell, and at the same time the lamp in the choir was re-lighted, and showed the three monks still there.

"What can this mean?" thought Chicot, starting up. Brave as he was, Chicot was not exempt from superstitious fears. He make the sign of the cross, murmuring, "Vade retro, Satanas!" But as the lights did not go out at the holy sign, Chicot began to think he had to deal with real monks and real lights; but at this moment one of the flag-stones of the choir raised itself slowly, and a monk appeared through the opening, after which the stone shut again. At this sight Chicot's hair stood on end, and he began to fear that all the priors and abbes of St. Genevieve, from Opsat, dead in 533, down to Pierre Boudin, predecessor of the present superior, were being resuscitated from their tombs, and were going to raise with their bony heads the stones of the choir. But this doubt did not last long.

"Brother Monsoreau," said one of the monks to him who had just made so strange an appearance.

"Yes, monseigneur," said he.

"Open the door that he may come to us."

Monsoreau descended to open the door between the staircases, and at the same time the monk in the middle lowered his hood, and showed the great scar, that noble sign by which the Parisians recognized their hero.

"The great Henri of Guise himself!" thought Chicot, "whom his very imbecile majesty believes occupied at the siege of La Charite. Ah! and he at the right is the Cardinal of Lorraine, and he at the left M. de Mayenne—a trinity not very holy, but very visible."

"Did you think he would come?" said La Balafre to his brothers.

"I was so sure of it, that I have under my cloak wherewith to replace the holy vial."

And Chicot perceived, by the feeble light of the lamp, a silver gilt box, richly chased. Then about twenty monks, with their heads buried in immense hoods, came out of the crypt, and stationed themselves in the nave. A single one, conducted by M. de Monsoreau, mounted the staircase, and placed himself at the right of M. de Guise.

Then M. de Guise spoke. "Friends," said he, "time is precious; therefore I go straight to the point. You have heard just now, in the first assembly, the complaints of some of our members, who tax with coldness the principal person among us, the prince nearest to the throne. The time is come to render justice to this prince; you shall hear and judge for yourselves whether your chiefs merit the reproach of coldness and apathy made by one of our brothers, the monk Gorenflot, whom we have not judged it prudent to admit into our secret."

At this name, pronounced in a tone which showed bad intentions toward the warlike monk, Chicot in his confessional could not help laughing quietly.

"Monseigneur," said the duke, now turning toward the mysterious personages at his right, "the will of God appears to me manifest; for since you have consented to join us, it shows that what we do is well done. Now, your highness, we beg of you to lower your hood, that your faithful friends may see with their own eyes that you keep the promise which I made in your name, and which they hardly dared to believe."

The mysterious personage now lowered his hood, and Chicot saw the head of the Duc d'Anjou appear, so pale that, by the light of the lamp, it looked like that of a marble statue.

"Oh, oh!" thought Chicot, "the duke is not yet tired of playing for the crown with the heads of others!"

"Long live Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" cried the assembly.

The duke grew paler than ever.

"Fear nothing, monseigneur," said

Henri de Guise; "our chapel is deaf, and its doors are well closed."

"My brothers," said the Comte de Monsoreau, "his highness wishes to address a few words to the assembly."

"Yes, yes!" cried they.

"Gentlemen," began he, in a voice so trembling that at first they could hardly distinguish his words, "I believe that God, who often seems insensible and deaf to the things of this world, keeps, on the contrary, His piercing eyes constantly on us, and only remains thus careless in appearance in order to remedy, by some great blow, the disorders caused by the foolish ambitions of men. I also have kept my eyes, if not on the world, at least on France. What have I seen there? The holy religion of Christ shaken to its foundation by those who sap all belief, under the pretext of drawing nearer to God, and my soul has been full of grief. In the midst of this grief, I heard that several noble and pious gentlemen, friends of our old faith, were trying to strengthen the tottering altar. I threw my eyes around me, and saw on one side the heretics, from whom I recoiled with horror; on the other side the elect, and I am come to throw myself into their arms. My brothers, here I am."

The applause and bravos resounded through the chapel. Then the cardinal, turning to the duke, said:

"You are among us of your own free will?"——"Of my free will, monsieur."

"Who instructed you in the holy mystery?"

"My friend, the Comte de Monsoreau, a man zealous for religion."

"Then," said the Duc de Guise, "as your highness has joined us, have the goodness to tell us what you intend to do for the league."

"I intend to serve the Catholic religion in all its extent."

"Ventre de biche!" thought Chicot, "why not propose this right out to the king? It would suit him excellently—processions, macerations, extirpation of heresy, fagots, and auto-dafés! Go on, worthy brother of his majesty, noble imbecile, go on!"

And the duke, as if sensible of the encouragement, proceeded: "But the interests of religion are not the sole aim which you gentlemen propose. As for me, I see another; for when a gentleman has thought of what he owes to God, he then thinks of his country, and he asks himself if it really enjoys all the honor and prosperity which it ought to enjoy. I ask this about our France, and I see with grief that it does not. Indeed, the state is torn to pieces by different wills and tastes, one as powerful as the other. It is, I fear, to the feebleness of the head, which forgets that it ought to govern all for the good of its subjects, or only remembers this royal principle at capricious intervals, when the rare acts of energy are generally not for the good, but the ill of France, that we must attribute these evils. Whatever be the cause, the ill is a real one, although I accuse certain false friends of the king rather than the king himself. Therefore I join myself to those who by all means seek the extinction of heresy and the ruin of perfidious counselors."

This discourse appeared profoundly to interest the audience, who, throwing back their hoods, drew near to the duke.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "in thanking your royal highness for the words you have just uttered, I will add that you are surrounded by people devoted not only to the principles which you profess, but to the person of your highness; and if you have any doubt, the conclusion of this sitting will convince you."

"Monseigneur," said the cardinal, "if your highness still experiences any fear, the names of those who now surround you will, I hope, reassure you. Here is M. le Gouverneur d'Aunis, M. d'Antragues, M. de Ribeirac, and M. de Livarot, gentlemen whom your highness doubtless knows to be as brave as loyal. Here are, besides, M. de Castillon, M. le Baron de Lusignan, MM. Cruce and Leclerc, all ready to march under the guidance of your highness, to the emancipation of religion and the throne. We shall, then, receive with gratitude the orders that you will give us."

Then M. de Mayenne said: "You are by your birth, and by your wisdom, monseigneur, the natural chief of the Holy Union, and we ought to learn from you what our conduct should be with regard to the false friends of his majesty of whom you just now spoke."

"Nothing more simple," replied the prince, with that feverish excitement which in weak natures supplies the place of courage to weak minds; "when venomous plants grow in a field, we root them up. The king is surrounded, not with friends, but with courtiers, who ruin him, and cause a perpetual scandal in France and all Christendom."

"It is true," said the Duc de Guise, in a gloomy tone.

"And," said the cardinal, "these courtiers prevent us, who are his majesty's true friends, from approaching him, as we have the right to do by our birth and position."

"Let us, then," said M. de Mayenne, "leave the heretics to the vulgar leaguers; let us think of those who annoy and insult us, and who often fail in respect to the prince whom we honor, and who is our chief." The Duc d'Anjou grew red.

"Let us destroy," continued Mayenne, "to the last man, that cursed race whom the king enriches, and let each of us charge ourselves with the life of one. We are thirty here; let us count."

"I," said D'Antragues, "charge myself with Quelus."

"I with Maugiron," said Livarot.

"And I with Schomberg," said Ribeirac.

"Good!" said the duke; "and there is Bussy, my brave Bussy, who will undertake some of them."

"And us!" cried the rest.

M. de Monsoreau now advanced. "Gentlemen," said he, "I claim an instant's silence. We are resolute men, and yet we fear to speak freely to each other; we are intelligent men, and yet we are deterred by foolish scruples. Come, gentlemen, a little courage, a little hardihood, a little frankness. It is not of the king's minions that we think; there does not lie our difficulty. What we really complain of is the royalty which we are under, and which is not acceptable to a French nobility; prayers and despotism, weakness and orgies, prodigality for fetes which make all Europe laugh, and parsimony for everything that regards the state and the arts. Such conduct is not weakness or ignorance—it is madness."

A dead silence followed this speech. Every one trembled at the words which echoed his own thoughts. M. de Monsoreau went on.

"Must we live under a king, foolish, inert, and lazy, at a time when all other nations are active, and work gloriously, while we sleep? Gentlemen, pardon me for saying before a prince, who will perhaps blame my temerity (for he has the prejudices of family), that for four years we have been governed, not by a king, but by a monk."

At these words, the explosion so skillfully prepared and as skillfully kept in check, burst out with violence.

"Down with the Valois!" they cried, "down with Brother Henri! Let us have for chief a gentleman, a knight, rather a tyrant than a monk."

"Gentlemen!" cried the Duc d'Anjou, hypocritically, "let me plead for my brother, who is led away. Let me hope that our wise remonstrances, that the efficacious intervention of the power of the League, will bring him back into the right path."

"Hiss, serpent, hiss," said Chicot to himself.

"Monseigneur," replied the Duc de Guise, "your highness has heard, perhaps rather too soon, but still you have heard, the true meaning of the association. No! we are not really thinking of a league against the Béarnais, nor of a league to support the Church, which will support itself: no, we think of raising the nobility of France from its abject condition. Too long we have been kept back by the respect we feel for your highness, by the love which we know you to have for your family. Now, all is revealed, monseigneur, and your highness will assist at the true sitting of the League. All that has passed is but preamble."

"What do you mean, M. le Duc?" asked the prince, his heart beating at once with alarm and ambition.

"Monseigneur, we are united here, not only to talk, but to act. To-day we choose a chief capable of honoring and enriching the nobility of France; and as it was the custom of the ancient Franks when they chose a chief to give him a present worthy of him, we offer a present to the chief whom we have chosen."

All hearts beat, and that of the prince most of any; yet he remained mute and motionless, betraying his emotion only by his paleness.

"Gentlemen," continued the duke, taking something from behind him, "here is the present that in your name I place at the feet of the prince."

"A crown!" cried the prince, scarcely able to stand, "a crown to me, gentlemen?"

"Long live Francois III.!" cried all the gentlemen, drawing their swords.

"I! I!" cried the duke, trembling with joy and terror. "It is impossible! My brother still lives; he is the anointed of the Lord."

"We depose him," said the duke, "waiting for the time when God shall sanction, by his death, the election which we are about to make, or rather, till one of his subjects, tired of this inglorious reign, forestalls by poison or the dagger the justice of God."

"Gentlemen!" said the duke, feebly.

"Monseigneur," then said the cardinal, "to the scruple which you so nobly expressed just now, this is our answer. Henri III. was the anointed of the Lord, but we have deposed him; it is you who are going to be so. Here is a temple as venerable as that of Rheims; for here have reposed the relics of St. Genevieve, patroness of Paris; here has been embalmed the body of Clovis, our first Christian king; well, monseigneur, in this holy temple, I, one of the princes of the church, and who may reasonably hope to become one day its head, I tell you, monseigneur, that here, to replace the holy oil, is an oil sent by Pope Gregory XIII. Monseigneur, name your future archbishop of Rheims, name your constable, and in an instant, it is you who will be king, and your brother Henri, if he do not give you up the crown, will be the usurper. Child, light the altar."

Immediately, the lad, who was evidently waiting, came out, and presently fifty lights shone round the altar and choir.

Then was seen on the altar a miter glittering with precious stones, and a large sword ornamented with fleurs-de-lis. It was the archbishop's miter and the constable's sword. At the same moment the organ began to play the Veni Creator. This sudden stroke, managed by the three Lorraine princes, and which the Duc d'Anjou himself did not expect, made a profound impression on the spectators. The courageous grew bolder than ever, and the weak grew strong. The Duc d'Anjou raised his head, and with a firmer step than might have been expected, walked to the altar, took the miter in the left hand and the sword in the right, presented one to the cardinal and the other to the duke. Unanimous applause followed this action.

"Now, gentlemen," said the prince to the others, "give your names to M. de Mayenne, grand master of France, and the day when I ascend the throne, you shall have the cordon bleu."

"Mordieu!" thought Chicot, "what a pity I cannot give mine; I shall never have such another opportunity."

"Now to the altar, sire," said the cardinal.

"Monsieur de Monsoreau my colonel, MM. de Ribeirac and d'Antragues my captains, and M. Livarot, my lieutenant of the guards, take your places."

Each of those named took the posts which, at a real coronation, etiquette would have assigned to them. Meanwhile, the cardinal had passed behind the altar to put on his pontifical robes; soon he reappeared with the holy vial. Then the lad brought to him a Bible and a cross. The cardinal put the cross on the book and extended them toward the Duc d'Anjou, who put his hand on them, and said—

"In the presence of God, I promise to

my people to maintain and honor our holy religion as a Christian king should. And may God and his saints aid me!"

Then the Duc de Guise laid the sword before the altar, and the cardinal blessed it and gave it to the prince.

"Sire," said he, "take this sword, which is given to you with the blessing of God, that you may resist your enemies and protect and defend the holy Church, which is confided to you. Take this sword, that, with it, you may exercise justice, protect the widow and the orphan, repair disorders, so that, covering yourself with glory by all the virtues, you will be a blessing to your people."

Then the prince returned the sword to the Duc de Guise, and knelt down. The cardinal opened the gold box, and, with the point of a golden needle, drew out some holy oil; he then said two prayers, and taking the oil on his finger, traced with it a cross on the head of the prince, saying, "*Ungo dein regem de oleo sanctificato, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*"

The lad wiped off the oil with an embroidered handkerchief. Then the cardinal took the crown, and, holding it over the head of the prince, said, "God crown thee with the crown of glory and justice." Then, placing it, "Receive this crown, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

All brandished their swords and cried, "Long live Francois III."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "you reign henceforth over France."

"Gentlemen," said the prince, "I shall never forget the names of the thirty gentlemen who first judged me worthy to reign over them; and now adieu, and may God have you in His holy keeping."

The Duc de Mayenne led away the new king, while the other two brothers exchanged an ironical smile.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW CHICOT LEARNED GENEALOGY.

WHEN the Duc d'Anjou was gone, and had been followed by all the others, the three Guises entered the vestry. Chicot, thinking of course this was the end, got up to stretch his limbs, and then, as it was nearly two o'clock, once more disposed himself to sleep.

But to his great astonishment, the three brothers almost immediately came back again, only this time without their frocks. On seeing them appear, the lad burst into so hearty a fit of laughing, that Chicot could hardly help laughing also.

"Do not laugh so loud, sister," said the Duc de Mayenne; "they are hardly gone out, and might hear you."

As he spoke, the seeming lad threw back his hood, and displayed a head as charming and intelligent as was ever painted by Leonardo da Vinci. Black eyes, full of fun, but which could assume an expression almost terrible in its seriousness, a little rosy mouth, and a round chin terminating the perfect oval of a rather pale face. It was Madame de Montpensier, a dangerous syren, who had the soul of a demon with the face of an angel.

"Ah, brother cardinal," cried she, "how well you acted the holy man! I was really afraid for a minute that you were serious; and he letting himself be greased and crowned. Oh, how horrid he looked with his crown on!"

"Never mind," said the duke, "we have got what we wanted, and Francois cannot now deny his share. Monsoreau, who doubtless had his own reasons for it, led the thing on well, and now he cannot abandon us, as he did La Mole and Coconnas."

Chicot saw that they had been laughing at M. d'Anjou, and as he detested him, would willingly have embraced them for it, always excepting M. de Mayenne, and giving his share to his sister.

"Let us return to business," said the cardinal, "is all well closed?"

"Oh, yes!" said the duchess, "but if you like I will go and see."

"Oh, no; you must be tired."

"No; it was too amusing."

"Mayenne, you say he is here?"

"Yes."

"I did not see him."

"No, he is hidden in a confessional."

These words started Chicot fearfully.

"Then he has heard and seen all?" asked the duke.

"Never mind, he is one of us."

"Bring him here, Mayenne."

Mayenne descended the staircase and came straight to where Chicot was hiding. He was brave, but now his teeth chattered with terror. "Ah," thought he, trying to get out his sword from under his monk's frock, "at least I will kill him first!" The duke had already extended his hand to open the door, when Chicot heard the duchess say:

"Not there, Mayenne; in that confessional to the left."

"It was time," thought Chicot, as the duke turned away, "but who the devil can the other be?"

"Come out, M. David," said Mayenne, "we are alone."

"Here I am, monseigneur," said he, coming out.

"You have heard all?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"I have not lost a word, monseigneur."

"Then you can report it to the envoy of his Holiness Gregory XIII.?"

"Everything."

"Now, Mayenne tells me you have done wonders for us; let us see."

"I have done what I promised, monseigneur; that is to say, found a method of seating you, without opposition, on the throne of France!"

"They also!" thought Chicot; "every one wants then to be king of France!"

Chicot was gay now, for he felt safe once more, and he had discovered a conspiracy by which he hoped to ruin his two enemies.

"To gain a legitimate right is everything," continued Nicolas David, "and I have discovered that you are the true heirs, and the Valois only a usurping branch."

"It is difficult to believe," said the duke, "that our house, however illustrious it may be, comes before the Valois."

"It is nevertheless proved, monseigneur," said David, drawing out a parchment. The duke took it.

"What is this?" said he.

"The genealogical tree of the house of Lorraine."

"Of which the root is?"

"Charlemagne, monseigneur."

"Charlemagne!" cried the three brothers, with an air of incredulous satisfaction, "impossible!"

"Wait, monseigneur; you may be sure I have not raised a point to which any one may give the lie. What you want is a long lawsuit, during which you can gain over, not the people, they are yours, but the parliament. See, then, monseigneur, here it is. Ranier, first Duc de Lorraine, contemporary with Charlemagne;—Guibert, his son;—Henri, son of Guibert—"

"But—" said the duke.

"A little patience, monseigneur. Bonne—"

"Yes," said the duke, "daughter of Ricin, second son of Ranier."

"Good; to whom married?"

"Bonne?"

"Yes."

"To Charles of Lorraine, son of Louis IV., king of France."

"Just so. Now add, 'brother of Lothaire, despoiled of the crown of France by the usurper, Hugh Capet.'"

"Oh! oh!" said the duke and the cardinal.

"Now, Charles of Lorraine inherited from his brother Lothaire. Now, the race of Lothaire is extinct, therefore you are the only true heirs of the throne."

"What do you say to that, brother?" cried the cardinal.

"I say, that unluckily there exists in France a law they call the Salic law, which destroys all our pretensions."

"I expected that objection, monseigneur," said David, "but what is the first example of the Salic law?"

"The accession of Philippe de Valois, to the prejudice of Edward of England."

"What was the date of that accession?"

"1328," said the cardinal.

"That is to say, 341 years after the usurpation of Hugh Capet, 240 years after the extinction of the race of Lothaire. Then, for 240 years your ancestors had already had a right to the throne

before the Salic law was invented. Now, every one knows that the law cannot have any retrospective effect."

"You are a clever man, M. David," said the Duc de Guise.

"It is very ingenious," said the cardinal.

"It is very fine," said Mayenne.

"It is admirable," said the duchess; "then I am a princess royal. I will have no one less than the emperor of Germany for a husband."

"Well; here are your 200 gold crowns which I promised you."

"And here are 200 others," said the cardinal, "for the new mission with which we are about to charge you."

"Speak, monseigneur, I am ready."

"We cannot commission you to carry this genealogy yourself to our holy father, Gregory XIII."

"Alas! no; my will is good, but I am of too poor birth."

"Yes, it is a misfortune. We must therefore send Pierre de Gondy on this mission."

"Permit me to speak," said the duchess. "The Gondys are clever, no doubt, but ambitious, and not to be trusted."

"Oh! reassure yourself. Gondy shall take this, but mixed with other papers, and not knowing what he carries. The pope will approve, or disapprove, silently, and Gondy will bring us back the answer, still in ignorance of what he brings. You, Nicolas David, shall wait for him at Chalons, Lyons, or Avignon, according to your instructions. Thus you alone will know our true secret."

Then the three brothers shook hands, embraced their sister, put on again their monks' robes, and disappeared. Behind them the porter drew the bolts, and then came in and extinguished the lights, and Chicot heard his retreating steps fainter and fainter, and all was silent.

"It seems now all is really over," thought Chicot, and he came out of the confessional. He had noticed in a corner a ladder, destined to clean the windows. He felt about until he found it, for it was close to him, and by the light of the moon placed it against the window. He easily opened it, and striding across it, and drawing the ladder to him with that force and address which either fear or joy always give, he drew it from the inside to the outside. When he had descended, he hid the ladder in a hedge, which was planted at the bottom of the wall, jumped from tomb to tomb, until he reached the outside wall, over which he clambered. Once in the street he breathed more freely; he had escaped with a few scratches from the place where he had several times felt his life in danger. He went straight to the Corne d'Abondance, at which he knocked. It was opened by Claude Boutromet himself, who knew him at once, although he went out dressed as a cavalier, and returned attired as a monk.

"Ah! is it you?" cried he.

Chicot gave him a crown, and asked for Gorenflot.

The host smiled, and said, "Look!"

Brother Gorenflot lay snoring just in the place where Chicot had left him.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW M. AND MADAME DE ST. LUC MET WITH A TRAVELING COMPANION.

THE next morning, about the time when Gorenflot woke from his nap, warmly rolled in his frock, our reader, if he had been traveling on the road from Paris to Angers, might have seen a gentleman and his page, riding quietly side by side. These cavaliers had arrived at Chartres the evening before, with foaming horses, one of which had fallen with fatigue, as they stopped. They entered the inn, and half an hour after set out on fresh horses. Once in the country, still bare and cold, the taller of the two approached the other, and said, as he opened his arms:

"Dear little wife, embrace me, for now we are safe."

Then Madame de St. Luc, leaning forward and opening her thick cloak, placed her arms round the young man's neck, and gave him the long and tender kiss which he had asked for. They stayed the night in the little village of Courville, four leagues only from Chartres, but which from its isolation seemed to them a secure retreat; and it was on the following morn-

ing that they were, as we said, pursuing their way. This day, as they were more easy in their minds, they traveled no longer like fugitives, but like school-boys seeking for moss, for the first few early flowers, enjoying the sunshine, and amused at everything.

"Morbleu!" cried St. Luc, at last, "how delightful it is to be free. Have you ever been free, Jeanne?"

"I?" cried she, laughing, "never; it is the first time I ever felt so. My father was suspicious, and my mother lazy. I never went out without a governess and two lackeys, so that I do not remember having run on the grass, since, when a laughing child, I ran in the woods of Meridor with my dear Diana, challenging her to race, and rushing through the branches. But you, dear St. Luc; you were free at least?"

"I, free?"

"Doubtless, a man."

"Never. Brought up with the Duc d'Anjou, taken by him to Poland, brought back to Paris, condemned never to leave him by the perpetual rule of etiquette; pursued, if I tried to go away, by that doleful voice, crying, 'St. Luc, my friend, I am ennuye, come and amuse me.' Free, with that stiff corset which strangled me, and that great ruff which scratched my neck! No, I have never been free till now, and I enjoy it."

"If they should catch us, and send us to the Bastille?"

"If they only put us there together, we can bear it."

"I do not think they would. But there is no fear, if you only knew Meridor, its great oaks, and its endless thickets, its rivers, its lakes, its flower-beds and lawns; and, then, in the midst of all, the queen of this kingdom, the beautiful, the good Diana. And I know she loves me still; she is not capricious in her friendships. Think of the happy life we shall lead there."

"Let us push on; I am in haste to get there," and they rode on, stayed the night at Mans, and then set off Meridor. They had already reached the woods and thought themselves in safety, when they saw behind them a cavalier advancing at a rapid pace. St. Luc grew pale.

"Let us fly," said Jeanne.

"Yes; let us fly, for there is a plume on that hat which disquiets me; it is of a color much in vogue at the court, and he looks to me like an ambassador from our royal master."

But to fly was easier to say than to do; the trees grew so thickly that it was impossible to ride through them but slowly, and the soil was so sandy that the horses sunk into it at every step. The cavalier gained upon them rapidly, and soon they heard his voice crying:

"Eh, monsieur, do not run away; I bring you something you have lost."

"What does he say?" asked Jeanne.

"He says we have lost something."

"Eh! monsieur," cried the unknown, again, "you left a bracelet in the hotel at Courville. Diable! a lady's portrait; above all, that of Madame de Cosse. For the sake of that dear mamma, do not run away."

"I know that voice," said St. Luc.

"And then he speaks of my mother."

"It is Bussy!"

"The Comte de Bussy, our friend," and they reined up their horses.

"Good-morning, madame," said Bussy, laughing, and giving her the bracelet.

"Have you come from the king to arrest us?"

"No, ma foi, I am not sufficiently his majesty's friend for such a mission. No, I found your bracelet at the hotel, which showed me that you preceded me on my way."

"Then," said St. Luc, "it is chance which brings you on our path."

"Chance, or rather Providence."

Every remaining shadow of suspicion vanished before the sincere smile and bright eyes of the handsome speaker.

"Then you are traveling?" asked Jeanne.

"I am."

"But not like us?"

"Unhappily, no."

"I mean in disgrace. Where are you going?"

"Toward Angers, and you?"

"We also."

"Ah! I should envy your happiness if envy were not so vile."

"Eh! M. de Bussy, marry, and you will be as happy as we are," said Jeanne; "it is so easy to be happy when you are loved."

"Ah! madame, every one is not so fortunate as you."

"But you, the universal favorite."

"To be loved by every one is as though you were loved by no one, madame."

"Well, let me marry you, and you will know the happiness you deny."

"I do not deny the happiness, only that it does not exist for me."

"Shall I marry you?"

"If you marry me according to your taste, no; if according to mine, yes."

"Are you in love with a woman whom you cannot marry?"

"Comte," said Bussy, "beg your wife not to plunge daggers in my heart."

"Take care, Bussy; you will make me think it is with her you are in love."

"If it were so, you will confess, at least, that I am a lover not much to be feared."

"True," said St. Luc, remembering how Bussy had brought him his wife. "But confess, your heart is occupied."

"I avow it."

"By a love, or by a caprice!" asked Jeanne.

"By a passion, madame."

"I will cure you."

"I do not believe it."

"I will marry you."——"I doubt it."

"And I will make you as happy as you ought to be."

"Alas! madame, my only happiness now is to be unhappy."

"I am very determined."

"And I also."

"Well, will you accompany us?"

"Where are you going?"

"To the chateau of Meridor."

The blood mounted to the cheeks of Bussy, and then he grew so pale, that his secret would certainly have been betrayed, had not Jeanne been looking at her husband with a smile. Bussy therefore had time to recover himself, and said:

"Where is that?"

"It is the property of one of my best friends."

"One of your best friends, and—are they at home?"

"Doubtless," said Jeanne, who was completely ignorant of the events of the last two months; "but have you never heard of the Baron de Meridor, one of the richest noblemen in France, and of—"

"Of what?"

"Of his daughter, Diana, the most beautiful girl possible?"

Bussy was filled with astonishment, asking himself by what singular happiness he found on the road people to talk to him of Diana de Meridor, to echo the only thought which he had in his mind.

"Is this castle far off, madame?" asked he.

"About seven leagues, and we shall sleep there to-night; you will come, will you not?"

"Yes, madame."

"Come, that is already a step toward the happiness I promised you."

"And the baron, what sort of a man is he?"

"A perfect gentleman, a preux chevalier, who, had he lived in King Arthur's time, would have had a place at his round table."

"And," said Bussy, steadying his voice, "to whom is his daughter married?"

"Diana married?"

"Would that be extraordinary?"

"Of course not, only I should have been the first to hear of it."

Bussy could not repress a sigh. "Then," said he, "you expect to find Mademoiselle de Meridor at the chateau with her father?"

"We trust so."

They rode on a long time in silence, and at last Jeanne cried:

"Ah! there are the turrets of the castle. Look, M. de Bussy, through that great leafless wood, which, in a month, will be so beautiful; do you not see the roof?"

"Yes," said Bussy, with an emotion which astonished himself; "and is that the chateau of Meridor?"

And he thought of the poor prisoner shut up in the Rue St. Antoine.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OLD MAN.

Two hours after they reached the castle. Bussy had been debating within himself whether or not to confide to his friends what he knew about Diana. But there was much that he could tell to no one, and he feared their questions, and besides, he wished to enter Meridor as a stranger.

Madame de St. Luc was surprised, when the porter sounded his horn to announce a visit, that Diana did not run as usual to meet them, but instead of her appeared an old man, bent and leaning on a stick, and his white hair flying in the wind. He crossed the drawbridge, followed by two great dogs, and when he drew quite near, said in a feeble voice—

"Who is there, and who does a poor old man the honor to visit him?"

"It is I, Seigneur Augustin!" cried the laughing voice of the young woman.

But the baron, raising his head slowly, said, "You? I do not see. Who is it?"

"Oh, mon Dieu!" cried Jeanne, "do you not know me? It is true, my disguise—"

"Excuse me," said the old man, "but I can see little; the eyes of old men are not made for weeping, and if they weep too much, the tears burn them."

"Must I tell you my name? I am Madame de St. Luc."

"I do not know you."

"Ah! but my maiden name was Jeanne de Cosse-Brissac."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" cried the old man, trying to open the gate with his trembling hands. Jeanne, who did not understand this strange reception, still attributed it only to his declining faculties; but, seeing that he remembered her, jumped off her horse to embrace him, but as she did so she felt his cheek wet with tears.

"Come," said the old man, turning toward the house, without even noticing the others. The chateau had a strange sad look; all the blinds were down, and no one was visible.

"Is Diana unfortunately not at home?" asked Jeanne.

The old man stopped, and looked at her with an almost terrified expression. "Diana!" said he. At this name the two dogs uttered a mournful howl. "Diana!" repeated the old man; "do you not, then, know?"

And his voice, trembling before, was extinguished in a sob.

"But what has happened?" cried Jeanne, clasping her hands.

"Diana is dead!" cried the old man, with a torrent of tears.

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, growing as pale as death.

"Dead," thought Bussy; "then he has let him also think her dead. Poor old man! how he will bless me some day!"

"Dead!" cried the old man again; "they killed her."

"Ah, my dear baron!" cried Jeanne, bursting into tears, and throwing her arms round the old man's neck.

"But," said he at last, "though desolate and empty, the old house is none the less hospitable. Enter."

Jeanne took the old man's arm, and they went into the dining-hall, where he sunk into his armchair. At last he said, "You say you were married; which is your husband?"

M. de St. Luc advanced and bowed to the old man, who tried to smile as he saluted him; then, turning to Bussy, said, "And this gentleman?"

"He is our friend, M. Louis de Clermont, comte de Bussy d'Amboise, gentleman of M. le Duc d'Anjou."

At these words the old man started up, threw a withering glance at Bussy, and then sank back with a groan.

"What is it?" said Jeanne.

"Does the baron know you, M. de Bussy?" asked St. Luc.

"It is the first time I ever had the honor of seeing M. de Meridor," said Bussy, who alone understood the effect which the name of the Duc d'Anjou had produced on the old man.

"Ah! you a gentleman of the Duc d'Anjou!" cried the baron; "of that monster, that demon, and you dare to

avow it, and have the audacity to present yourself here!"

"Is he mad?" asked St. Luc of his wife.——"Grief must have turned his brain," replied she, in terror.

"Yes, that monster!" cried he again; "the assassin who killed my child! Ah, you do not know," continued he, taking Jeanne's hands; "but the duke killed my Diana, my child—he killed her!"

Tears stood in Bussy's eyes, and Jeanne said:

"Seigneur, were it so, which I do not understand, you cannot accuse M. de Bussy of this dreadful crime—he, who is the most noble and generous gentleman living. See, my good father, he weeps with us. Would he have come had he known how you would receive him? Ah, dear baron, tell us how this catastrophe happened."

"Then you did not know?" said the old man to Bussy.

"Eh, mon Dieu! no," cried Jeanne, "we none of us knew."

"My Diana is dead, and her best friend did not know it! Oh, it is true! I wrote to no one; it seemed to me that everything must die with her. Well, this prince, this disgrace to France, saw my Diana, and, finding her so beautiful, had her carried away to his castle of Beaugé to dishonor her. But Diana, my noble and sainted Diana, chose death instead. She threw herself from the window into the lake, and they found nothing but her veil floating on the surface." And the old man finished with a burst of sobs which overwhelmed them all.

"Oh, comte," cried St. Luc, "you must abandon this infamous prince; a noble heart like yours cannot remain friendly to a ravisher and an assassin!"

But Bussy, instead of replying to this, advanced to M. de Meridor.

"M. le Baron," said he, "will you grant me the honor of a private interview?"

"Listen to M. de Bussy, dear seigneur," said Jeanne; "you will see that he is good and may help you."

"Speak, monsieur," said the baron, trembling.

Bussy turned to St. Luc and his wife, and said: "Will you permit me?"

The young couple went out, and then Bussy said: "M. le Baron, you have accused the prince whom I serve in terms which force me to ask for an explanation. Do not mistake the sense in which I speak; it is with the most profound sympathy, and the most earnest desire to soften your griefs, that I beg of you to recount to me the details of this dreadful event. Are you sure all hope is lost?"

"Monsieur, I had once a moment's hope. A noble gentleman, M. de Monsoreau, loved my poor daughter, and interested himself for her."

"M. de Monsoreau! Well, what was his conduct in all this?"

"Ah, generous; for Diana had refused his hand. He was the first to tell me of the infamous projects of the duke; he showed me how to baffle them, only asking, if he succeeded, for her hand. I gave my consent with joy; but alas! it was useless—he arrived too late—my poor Diana had saved herself by death."

"And since then, what have you heard of him?"

"It is a month ago, and the poor gentleman has not dared to appear before me, having failed in his generous design."

"Well, monsieur," said Bussy, "I am charged by the Duc d'Anjou to bring you to Paris, where his highness desires to speak to you."

"I!" cried the baron, "I see this man! And what can the murderer have to say to me?"

"Who knows? To justify himself, perhaps."

"No, M. de Bussy, no, I will not go to Paris; it would be too far away from where my child lies in her cold bed."

"M. le Baron," said Bussy firmly, "I have come expressly to take you to Paris, and it is my duty to do so."

"Well, I will go," cried the old man, trembling with anger; "but woe to those who bring me. The king will hear me, or, if he will not, I will appeal to all the gentlemen of France. Yes, M. de Bussy, I will accompany you."

"And I, M. le Baron," said Bussy,

taking his hand, "recommend to you the patience and calm dignity of a Christian nobleman. God is merciful to noble hearts, and you know not what He reserves for you. I beg you also, while waiting for that day, not to count me among your enemies, for you do not know what I will do for you. Till to-morrow, then, baron, and early in the morning we will set off."

"I consent," replied the old baron, moved by Bussy's tone and words; "but meanwhile, friend or enemy, you are my guest, and I will show you to your room."

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW REMY-LE-HAUDOUIN HAD, IN BUSSY'S ABSENCE, ESTABLISHED A COMMUNICATION WITH THE RUE ST. ANTOINE.

M. AND MADAME DE ST. LUC could hardly recover from their surprise. Bussy holding secret interviews with M. de Meridor, and then setting off with him for Paris, appearing to take the lead in a matter which at first seemed strange and unknown to him, was to the young people an inexplicable phenomenon. In the morning the baron took leave of his guests, begging them to remain in the castle. Before Bussy left, however, he whispered a few words to Madame de St. Luc, which brought the color to her cheeks and smiles to her eyes.

It was a long way from Meridor to Paris, especially for the old baron, covered with wounds from all his battles, and for his old horse, whom he called Jarnac. Bussy studied earnestly during the journey to find his way to the heart of the old man by his care and attentions, and without doubt he succeeded, for on the sixth morning, as they arrived at Paris, M. de Meridor said:

"It is singular, count, but I feel less unquiet at the end than at the beginning of my journey."

"Two hours more, M. le Baron, and you shall have judged me as I deserve."

"Where are we going—to the Louvre?"

"Let me first take you to my hotel, that you may refresh yourself a little, and be fit to see the person to whom I am leading you."

The count's people had been very much alarmed at his long absence, for he had set off without telling any one but Remy. Thus their delight on seeing him again was great, and they all crowded round him with joyous exclamations. He thanked them, and then said, "Now assist this gentleman to dismount, and remember that I look upon him with more respect than a prince."

When M. de Meridor had been shown to his room, and had had some refreshment, he asked if they should set out.

"Soon, baron; and be easy—it will be a happiness for you as well as for us."

"You speak in a language which I do not understand."

Bussy smiled, and left the room to seek Remy.

"Well! dear Hippocrates!" said he, "is there anything new?"

"Nothing; all goes well."

"Then the husband has not returned?"

"Yes, he has, but without success. It seems there is a father who is expected to turn up to make the denouement."

"Good," said Bussy, "but how do you know all this?"

"Why, monseigneur, as your absence made my position a sinecure, I thought I would try to make some little use of my time; so I took some books and a sword to a little room which I hired at the corner of the Rue St. Antoine, from whence I could see the house that you know."

"Very good."

"But as I feared, if I were constantly watching, to pass for a spy, I thought it better to fall in love."

"In love?"

"Oh yes, desperately with Gertrude; she is a fine girl, only two inches taller than myself, and who recounts capitally."

"Recounts?"

"Yes; through her I know all that passes with her mistress. I thought you might not dislike to have communications with the house."

"Remy, you are a good genius, whom chance, or rather Providence, has placed in my way. Then you are received in the house?"

"Last night I made my entrance on

the points of my toes, by the door you know."—"And how did you manage it?"

"Quite naturally. The day after you left, I waited at my door till the lady of my thoughts came out to buy provisions, which she does every morning. She recognized me, uttered a cry, and ran away."

"Then?"

"Then I ran after her, but could hardly catch her, for she runs fast; but still, petticoats are always a little in the way. 'Mon Dieu!' cried she. 'Holy Virgin!' said I. 'The doctor!' 'The charming housekeeper.' She smiled, but said, 'You are mistaken, monsieur, I do not know you.' 'But I know you,' I replied, 'and for the last three days I have lived but for you, and I adore you so much, that I no longer live in the Rue Beautrellis, but at the corner of this street, and I changed my lodging only to see you pass in and out.'"——"So that now you are—"

"As happy as a lover can be—with Gertrude."

"Does she suspect you come from me?"

"Oh no, how should the poor doctor know a great lord like M. de Bussy. No, I said, 'And how is your young master?' 'What young master?' 'The one I cured.' 'He is not my master.' 'Oh! I thought, as he was in your mistress's bed—' 'Oh! no, poor young man! we have only seen him once since.' 'Do you know his name?' 'Oh! yes; he is the Seigneur de Bussy.' 'What! the brave Bussy?' 'Yes, himself.' 'And your mistress?' 'Oh! she is married!' 'Yes, but still she may think sometimes of a handsome young man when she has seen him lying wounded in her bed.' 'Oh, to be frank, I do not say she does not think of him; we talk of him very often.' 'What do you say about him?' I asked. 'I recount all I hear about his prowess, and I have even taught her a little song about him, which she sings constantly.'"

Bussy pressed the young man's hand; he felt supremely happy.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

On descending into the court, M. de Meridor found a fresh horse, which Bussy had had prepared for him; another waited for Bussy, and attended by Remy, they started. As they went along, the baron could not but ask himself by what strange confidence he had accompanied, almost blindly, the friend of the prince to whom he owed all his misfortunes. Would it not have been better to have braved the Duc d'Anjou, and instead of following Bussy where it pleased him to lead, to have gone at once to the Louvre, and thrown himself at the feet of the king? What could the prince say to him? How could he console him? Could soft words heal his wound?"

When they stopped, "What," said the baron, "does the Duc d'Anjou live in this humble house?"

"Not exactly, monsieur, but if it is not his dwelling, it is that of a lady whom he has loved."

A cloud passed over the face of the old gentleman. "Monsieur," said he, "we provincials are not used to the easy manners of Paris; they annoy us. It seems to me that if the Duc d'Anjou wishes to see the Baron de Meridor, it ought to be at his palace, and not at the house of one of his mistresses."

"Come, come, baron!" said Bussy, with his smile, which always carried conviction with it, "do not hazard false conjectures. On my honor, the lady whom you are going to see is perfectly virtuous and worthy in all respects."

"Who is she then?"

"She is—the wife of a friend of yours."

"Really! but then, monsieur, why did you say the duke loved her?"

"Because I always speak truth. But enter, and you shall see accomplished all I have promised you."

"Take care; I wept for my child, and you said, 'Console yourself, monsieur, the mercy of God is great;' to promise me a consolation to my grief was almost to promise me a miracle."——"Enter, monsieur," said Bussy, with his bright smile.

Bussy went in first, and, running up to Gertrude, said, "Go and tell Madame de Monsoreau that M. de Bussy is here, and desires to speak to her. But," continued he, in a low voice, "not a word of the person who accompanies me."

"Madame de Monsoreau!" said the old man in astonishment. But as he feebly mounted the staircase, he heard the voice of Diana crying—

"M. de Bussy, Gertrude? Oh! let him come in!"

"That voice!" cried the baron, stopping. "Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

At that moment, as the baron tremblingly held on to the banister, and looked around him, he saw, at the top of the staircase, Diana, smiling, and more beautiful than ever. At this sight the old man uttered a cry and would have fallen, had he not caught hold of Bussy, who stood by him.

"Diana alive! Diana, oh, my God!"

"Mon Dieu! M. de Bussy!" cried Diana, running down, "what is the matter with my father?"

"He thought you dead, madame, and he wept, as a father must weep for a daughter like you."

"How!" cried Diana; "and no one undeceived him?"——"No one."

"No," cried the old man, recovering a little, "no one, not even M. de Bussy."

"Ungrateful," said Bussy.

"Oh! yes! you are right; for this moment repays me for all my griefs. Oh! my Diana! my beloved Diana!" cried he, drawing his daughter to him with one hand, and extending the other to Bussy. But all at once he cried, "But you said I was to see Madame de Monsoreau. Where is she?"

"Alas! my father!" cried Diana.

Bussy summoned up all his strength. "M. de Monsoreau is your son-in-law," he said.

"What! my son-in-law! and every one—even you, Diana—left me in ignorance."

"I feared to write, my father; he said my letters would fall into the hands of the prince. Besides, I thought you knew all."

"But why all these strange mysteries?"

"Ah, yes, my father; why did M. de Monsoreau let you think me dead, and not let you know I was his wife?"

The baron, overwhelmed, looked from Bussy to Diana. "M. de Monsoreau my son-in-law!" stammered he.

"That cannot astonish you, father; did you not order me to marry him?"

"Yes, if he saved you."

"Well! he did save me," said Diana, sinking on to a chair, "not from misfortune, but from shame."

"Then why did he let me think you dead? I, who wept for you so bitterly. Why did he let me die of despair, when a single word would have restored me?"

"Oh! there is some hidden mystery," cried Diana; "my father, you will not leave me again; M. de Bussy, you will protect us."

"Alas! madame! it belongs to me no more to enter into your family secrets. Seeing the strange maneuvers of your husband, I wished to bring you a defender; you have your father, I retire."

"He is right," said the old man, sadly. "M. de Monsoreau feared the Duc d'Anjou, and so does M. de Bussy."

Diana cast a glance at the young man. He smiled and said, "M. le Baron, excuse, I beg, the singular question I am about to ask; and you also, madame, for I wish to serve you. M. le Baron, ask Madame de Monsoreau if she be happy in the marriage which she has contracted in obedience to your orders."

Diana burst into tears for her only answer. The eyes of the baron filled also, for he began to fear that his friendship for M. de Monsoreau had tended to make his daughter unhappy.

"Now!" said Bussy, is it true that you voluntarily promised him your daughter's hand?"

"Yes, if he saved her."

"And he did save her. Then, monsieur, I need not ask if you mean to keep your promise."

"It is a law for all, and above all for gentlemen; you know that, M. de Bussy. My daughter must be his."

"Ah!" cried Diana, "would I were dead!"

"Madame," said Bussy, "you see I was right, and that I can do no more here. M. le Baron gives you to M. de Monsoreau, and you yourself promised to marry him when you should see your father again safe and well."

"Ah! you tear my heart, M. de Bussy," cried Diana, approaching the young man; "my father does not know that I fear this man, that I hate him; my father sees in him only my savior, and I think him my murderer."

"Diana! Diana!" cried the baron, "he saved you."

"Yes," cried Bussy, "but if the danger were less great than you thought; what do we know? There is some mystery in all this, which I must clear up. But I protest to you, that if I had had the happiness to be in the place of M. de Monsoreau, I would have saved your young and beautiful daughter without exacting a price for it."

"He loved her," said M. de Meridor, trying to excuse him.

"And I, then—" cried Bussy; and, although he stopped, frightened at what he was about to say, Diana heard and understood.

"Well!" cried she, reddening, "my brother, my friend, can you do nothing for me?"

"But the Duc d'Anjou," said the baron.

"I am not aware of those who fear the anger of princes," said Bussy; "and besides, I believe the danger lies not with him, but with M. de Monsoreau."

"But if the duke learns that Diana is alive, all is lost."

"I see," said Bussy, "you believe M. de Monsoreau more than me. Say no more; you refuse my aid; throw yourself, then, into the arms of the man who has already so well merited your confidence. Adieu, baron; adieu, madame, you will see me no more."

"Oh!" cried Diana, taking his hand. "Have you seen me waver for an instant; have you ever seen me soften toward him? No. I beg you, on my knees, M. de Bussy, not to abandon me."

Bussy seized her hands, and all his anger melted away like snow before the sun.

"Then so be it, madame," said he; "I accept the mission, and in three days—for I must have time to go to Chartres to the prince—you shall see me again." Then, in a low tone to her, he said, "We are allied against this Monsoreau; remember that it was not he who brought you back your father, and be faithful to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT AWOKE, AND THE RECEPTION HE MET WITH AT HIS CONVENT.

CHICOT, after seeing with pleasure that Gorenflot still slept soundly, told M. Boutromet to retire and to take the light with him, charging him not to say anything of his absence. Now M. Boutromet, having remarked that, in all transactions between the monk and Chicot, it was the latter who paid, had a great deal of consideration for him, and promised all he wished. Then, by the light of the fire which still smoldered, he wrapped Gorenflot once more in his frock, which he accomplished without eliciting any other signs of wakefulness than a few grunts, and afterward making a pillow of the table-cloth and napkins, laid down to sleep by his side. Daylight, when it came, succeeded in at last awakening Gorenflot, who sat up, and began to look about him, at the remains of their last night's repast, and at Chicot who, although also awake, lay pretending to snore, while, in reality, he watched.

"Broad daylight!" said the monk. "Corbleu, I must have passed the night here. And the abbey! Oh, dear! How happy he is to sleep thus!" cried he, looking at Chicot. "Ah! he is not in my position," and he sighed. "Shall I wake him to ask for advice? No, no, he will laugh at me; I can surely invent a falsehood without him. But whatever I invent, it will be hard to escape punishment. It is not so much the imprisonment, it is the bread and water I mind. Ah! if I had but some money to bribe the brother jailer."

Chicot, hearing this, adroitly slipped his purse from his pocket and put it under him. This precaution was not useless, for Gorenflot, who had been looking about him, now approached his friend softly, and murmuring:

"Were he awake, he would not refuse

me a crown, but his sleep is sacred, and I will take it," advanced and began feeling his pockets. "It is singular," said he, "nothing in his pockets. Ah! in his hat perhaps."

While he searched there Chicot adroitly emptied out his money, and stuffed the empty purse into his breeches' pocket.

"Nothing in the hat," said the monk. "Ah! I forgot," and thrusting in his hand, he drew from the pocket the empty purse. "Mon Dieu," cried he, "empty! and who will pay the bill?"

This thought terrified him so much that he got up and made instantly for the door, through which he quickly disappeared. As he approached the convent, his fears grew strong, and seeing a concourse of monks standing talking on the threshold, he felt inclined to fly. But some of them approached to meet him; he knew flight was hopeless, and resigned himself. The monks seemed at first to hesitate to speak to him, but at last one said: "Poor dear brother!"

Gorenflot sighed, and raised his eyes to heaven.

"You know the prior waits for you?"

"Ah! mon Dieu!"

"Oh! yes, he ordered that you should be brought to him as soon as you came in."

"I feared it," said Gorenflot. And more dead than alive, he entered the convent, whose doors closed on him. They led him to the prior. Gorenflot did not dare to raise his eyes, finding himself alone with his justly irritated superior.

"Ah! it is you at last," said the abbe.

"Reverend sir—"

"What anxiety you have given me."

"You are too good, my father," said Gorenflot, astonished at this indulgent tone.

"You feared to come in after the scene of last night?"

"I confess it."

"Ah, dear brother, you have been very imprudent."

"Let me explain, father."

"There is no need of explanations; your sally—"

"Oh! so much the better," thought Gorenflot.

"I understand it perfectly. A moment of enthusiasm carried you away; enthusiasm is a holy virtue, but virtues exaggerated become almost vices, and the most honorable sentiments, when carried to excess, are reprehensible."

"Pardon, my father," said Gorenflot, timidly, "but I do not understand. Of what sally do you speak?"

"Of yours last night."

"Out of the convent?"

"No; in it. I am as good a Catholic as you, but your audacity frightened me."

Gorenflot was puzzled. "Was I audacious?" asked he.

"More than that—rash."

"Alas! you must pardon me, my father. I will endeavor to correct myself."

"Yes; but meanwhile, I fear the consequences for you and for all of us. Had it passed among ourselves, it would have been nothing."

"How, is it known to others?"

"Doubtless; you know well there were more than a hundred laymen listening to your discourse."

"My discourse!" said Gorenflot, more and more astonished.

"I allow it was fine, and that the universal applause must have carried you on, but to propose to make a procession through the streets of Paris, with a helmet on your head and a partisan on your shoulder, appealing to all good Catholics, was rather too strong, you will allow."

Gorenflot looked bewildered.

"Now," continued the prior, "this religious fervor, which burns so strongly in your heart, will injure you in Paris. I wish you therefore to go and expend it in the provinces."

"An exile!" cried Gorenflot.

"If you remain here, much worse may happen to you, my dear brother."

"What?"

"Perpetual imprisonment, or even death."

Gorenflot grew frightfully pale; he could not understand how he had incurred all this by getting tipsy in an inn, and passing the night out of the convent.

"By submitting to this temporary ex-

ile, my dear brother, not only will you escape this danger, but you will plant the banner of our faith in the provinces, where such words are less dangerous than here, under the eyes of the king. Set off at once, then, brother; perhaps the archers are already out to arrest you."

"The archers, I!" said Gorenflot.

"I advise you to go at once."

"It is easy to say 'go,' but how am I to live?"

"Oh! nothing more easy. You will find plenty of partisans who will let you want for nothing. But go, in Heaven's name, and do not come back till you are sent for." And the prior, after embracing him, pushed him to the door. There he found all the community waiting for him, to touch his hands or his robe.

"Adieu!" said one, embracing him, "you are a holy man; do not forget me in your prayers."

"I, a holy man!" thought Gorenflot.

"Adieu, brave champion of the faith," said another.

"Adieu, martyr," said a third, "the light will soon come."

Thus was he conducted to the outside of the convent, and as he went away he exclaimed, "Devil take me, but either they are all mad, or I am."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT REMAINED CONVINCED THAT HE WAS A SOMNAMBULIST, AND BITTERLY DEPLORED THIS INFIRMITY.

UNTIL the day when this unmerited persecution fell on Brother Gorenflot, he had led a contemplative and easy life, diverting himself on occasions at the Corne d'Abondance, when he had gained a little money from the faithful. He was one of those monks for whom the world began at the prior of the convent, and finished at the cook. And now he was sent forth to seek for adventures. He had no money; so that when out of Paris and he heard eleven o'clock (the time for dinner at the convent) strike, he sat down in dejection. His first idea was to return to the convent, and ask to be put in confinement, instead of being sent into exile, and even to submit to the discipline, provided they would insure him his repasts. His next was more reasonable. He would go to the Corne d'Abondance, send for Chicot, explain to him the lamentable situation into which he had helped to bring him, and obtain aid from this generous friend. He was sitting absorbed in these reflections, when he heard the sound of a horse's feet approaching. In great fear, he hid behind a tree until the traveler should have passed; but a new idea struck him. He would endeavor to obtain some money for his dinner. So he approached tremblingly, and said, "Monsieur, if five paters, and five aves for the success of your projects would be agreeable to you—"

"Gorenflot!" cried the cavalier.

"M. Chicot!"

"Where the devil are you going?"

"I do not know. And you?"

"Oh! I am going straight before me."

"Very far?"

"Till I stop. But you—what are you doing outside the barriers?"

"Alas! M. Chicot! I am proscribed," said Gorenflot, with an enormous sigh.

"What?"

"Proscribed, I tell you. My brothers reject me from their bosom; I am anathematized, excommunicated."

"Bah! what for?"

"Listen, M. Chicot; you will not believe me, perhaps, but I do not know."

"Perhaps you were met last night gadding about."

"Do not joke; you know quite well what I was doing last night."

"Yes, from eight till ten, but not from ten till three."

"How, from ten till three?"

"Yes, at ten you went out."

"I?"

"Yes, and I asked you where you were going."

"And what did I say?"

"That you were going to pronounce a discourse."

"There was some truth in that," murmured Gorenflot.

"Yes, and you even told me part of it; it was very long, and there were terrible things against the king in it."

"Bah!"

"So terrible, that I should not wonder if you were arrested for them."

"M. Chicot, you open my eyes; did I seem quite awake when I spoke?"

"I must say you seemed very strange; you looked like a man who talks in his sleep."

"Yet, I feel sure I awoke this morning at the Corne d'Abondance."

"Well, of course; you came in again at three o'clock. I know; you left the door open, and made me cold."

"It is true, then?"

"True! ask M. Boutromet."

"M. Boutromet?"

"Yes, he opened to you on your return. And you were so full of pride when you came in, that I said to you—'Fie, compère; pride does not become mortals, more especially monks.'"

"And of what was I proud?"

"Of the success your discourse had met with, and the compliments paid to you by the Duc de Guise and M. de Mayenne."

"Now I understand all."

"That is lucky. Then you confess you went to the assembly; what did you call it? Oh! the Holy Union."

Gorenflot groaned. "I am a somnambulist," he said.

"What does that mean?"

"It means, that with me mind is stronger than matter; so that while the body sleeps, the spirit wakes, and sometimes is so powerful that it forces the body to obey."

"Ah! compère, that sounds much like magic; if you are possessed, tell me so frankly; for, really, a man who walks and makes discourses in his sleep in which he attacks the king is not natural. Vade retro, Satanas!"

"Then," cried Gorenflot, "you abandon me also. Ah! I could not have believed that of you."

Chicot took pity on him. "What did you tell me just now?" said he.

"I do not know; I feel half mad, and my stomach is empty."

"You spoke of traveling?"

"Yes, the holy prior sends me."

"Where to?"

"Wherever I like."

"I also am traveling, and will take you with me."

Gorenflot looked bewildered.

"Well! do you accept?" continued Chicot.

"Accept! I should think so. But have you money to travel with?"

"Look," said Chicot, drawing out his purse.

Gorenflot jumped for joy.

"How much?" said he.

"One hundred and fifty pistoles."

"And where are we going?"

"You shall see."

"When shall we breakfast?"

"Immediately."

"What shall I ride?"

"Not my horse; you would kill it."

"Then what must I do?"

"Nothing more simple; I will buy you an ass."

"You are my benefactor, M. Chicot. Let the ass be strong. Now, where do we breakfast?"

"Here; look over this door and read."

Gorenflot looked up, and saw, "Here eggs, ham, eel-pies, and white wine may be had!" At this sight, Gorenflot's whole face expanded with joy.

"Now," said Chicot, "go and get your breakfast, while I go and look for an ass for you."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT TRAVELED UPON AN ASS, NAMED PANURGE, AND LEARNED MANY THINGS HE DID NOT KNOW BEFORE.

WHAT made Chicot so indifferent to his own repast was, that he had already breakfasted plentifully. Therefore he sat Gorenflot down to eggs and bacon, while he went among the peasants to look for an ass. He found a pacific creature, four years old, and something between an ass and a horse; gave twenty-two livres for it, and brought it to Gorenflot, who was enchanted at the sight of it, and christened it Panurge. Chicot, seeing by the look of the table that there would be no cruelty in staying his companion's repast, said: "Come, now we must go on; at Melun we will lunch."

Gorenflot got up, merely saying, "At Melun, at Melun."

They went on for about four leagues, then Gorenflot lay down on the grass to sleep, while Chicot began to calculate.

"One hundred and twenty leagues, at ten leagues a day, would take twelve days." It was as much as he could reasonably expect from the combined forces of a monk and an ass. But Chicot shook his head. "It will not do," he said, "if he wants to follow me, he must do fifteen."

He pushed the monk to wake him, who, opening his eyes, said, "Are we at Melun? I am hungry."

"Not yet, compere, and that is why I woke you; we must get on; we go too slow, ventre de biche!"

"Oh no, dear M. Chicot; it is so fatiguing to go fast. Besides, there is no hurry: am I not traveling for the propagation of the faith, and you for pleasure? Well, the slower we go, the better the faith will be propagated, and the more you will amuse yourself. My advice is, to stay some days at Melun, where they make excellent eel-pies. What do you say, M. Chicot?"

"I say, that my opinion is to go as fast as possible; not to lunch at Melun, but only to sup at Monterau, to make up for lost time.

Gorenflot looked at his companion as if he did not understand.

"Come, let us get on," said Chicot.

The monk sat still and groaned.

"If you wish to stay behind and travel at your ease, you are welcome."

"No, no!" cried Gorenflot, in terror; "no, no, M. Chicot; I love you too much to leave you!"

"Then to your saddle at once."

Goronflot got on his ass this time sideways, as a lady sits, saying it was more comfortable; but the fact was that, fearing they were to go faster, he wished to be able to hold on both by mane and tail.

Chicot began to trot, and the ass followed. The first moments were terrible for Gorenflot, but he managed to keep his seat. From time to time Chicot stood up in his stirrups and looked forward, then, not seeing what he looked for, redoubled his speed.

"What are you looking for, dear M. Chicot?"

"Nothing; but we are not getting on."

"Not getting on! we are trotting all the way."

"Gallop, then!" and he began to canter.

Panurge again followed; Gorenflot was in agonies.

"Oh, M. Chicot!" said he, as soon as he could speak, "do you call this traveling for pleasure? It does not amuse me at all."

"On! on!"——"It is dreadful!"

"Stay behind, then!"

"Panurge can do no more; he is stopping."

"Then adieu, compere!"

Gorenflot felt half inclined to reply in the same manner, but he remembered that the horse, whom he felt ready to curse, bore on his back a man with a hundred and fifty pistoles in his pocket, so he resigned himself, and beat his ass to make him gallop once more.

"I shall kill my poor Panurge!" cried he dolefully, thinking to move Chicot.

"Well, kill him," said Chicot quietly, "and we will buy another."

All at once Chicot, on arriving at the top of a hill, reined in his horse suddenly. But the ass, having once taken it into his head to gallop, was not so easily stopped, and Gorenflot was forced to let himself slide off and hang on to the donkey with all his weight before he could stop him.

"Ah, M. Chicot!" cried he, "what does it all mean? First we must gallop fit to break our necks, and then we must stop short here!"

Chicot had hidden himself behind a rock, and was eagerly watching three men who, about two hundred yards in advance, were traveling on quietly on their mules, and he did not reply.

"I am tired and hungry!" continued Gorenflot angrily.

"And so am I," said Chicot; "and at the first hotel we come to we will order a couple of fricasseed chickens, some ham, and a jug of their best wine."

"Really, is it true this time?"

"I promise you, compere."

"Well, then, let us go and seek it. Come, Panurge, you shall have some dinner."

Chicot remounted his horse, and Gorenflot led his ass. The much-desired inn soon appeared, but, to the surprise of Gorenflot, Chicot caused him to make a detour and pass round the back. At the front door were standing the three travelers.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT CHANGED HIS ASS FOR A MULE, AND HIS MULE FOR A HORSE.

However, Gorenflot's troubles were near their end for that day, for after the detour they went on a mile, and then stopped at a rival hotel. Chicot took a room which looked on to the high road, and ordered supper. But even while he was eating he was constantly on the watch. However, at ten o'clock, as he had seen nothing, he went to bed, first, however, ordering that the horse and the ass should be ready at daybreak.

"At daybreak?" uttered Gorenflot, with a deep sigh.

"Yes; you must be used to getting up at that time."

"Why so?"

"For matins."

"I had an exemption from the superior." Chicot ordered Gorenflot's bed to be placed in his room. With daylight he was up and at the window, and before very long he saw three mules coming along. He ran to Gorenflot and shook him.

"Can I not have a moment's rest?" cried the monk, who had been sleeping for ten hours.

"Be quick; get up and dress, for we are going."

"But the breakfast?"

"Is on the road to Monterau."

"Where is Monterau?"

"It is the city where we breakfast, that is enough for you. Now, I am going down to pay the bill, and if you are not ready in five minutes, I go without you."

A monk's toilet takes not long; however, Gorenflot took six minutes, and when he came down Chicot was starting. This day passed much like the former one, and by the third, Gorenflot was beginning to get accustomed to it, when toward the evening, Chicot lost all his gayety. Since noon he had seen nothing of the three travelers; therefore he was in a very bad humor. They were off at daybreak and galloped till noon, but all in vain; no mules were visible. Chicot stopped at a turnpike, and asked the man if he had seen three travelers pass on mules.

"Not to-day," was the reply, "yesterday evening about seven."

"What were they like?"

"They looked like a master and two servants!"

"It was them," said Chicot; "ventre de biche! they have twelve hours' start of me. But courage!"

"Listen, M. Chicot!" said Gorenflot, "my ass can do no more, even your horse is almost exhausted." Chicot looked, and saw, indeed, that the poor animals were trembling from head to foot.

"Well! brother," said he, "we must take a resolution. You must leave me."

"Leave you; why?"

"You go too slow."

"Slow! why, we have galloped for five hours this morning."

"That is not enough."

"Well, then, let us go on; the quicker we go, the sooner we shall arrive, for I suppose we shall stop at last."

"But our animals are exhausted."

"What shall we do then?"

"Leave them here, and take them as we come back."

"Then how are we to proceed?"

"We will buy mules."

"Very well," said Gorenflot with a sigh. Two mules were soon found, and they went so well that in the evening Chicot saw with joy those of the three travelers, standing at the door of a farrier's. But they were without harness, and both master and lackeys had disappeared. Chicot trembled. "Go," said he, to Gorenflot, "and ask if those mules

are for sale, and where their owners are." Gorenflot went, and soon returned, saying that a gentleman had sold them, and had afterward taken the road to Avignon.

"Alone?"

"No, with a lackey."

"And where is the other lackey?"

"He went toward Lyons."

"And how did they go on?"

"On horses which they bought."

"Of whom?"

"Of a captain of troopers who was here, and they sold their mules to a dealer, who is trying to sell them again to those Franciscan monks whom you see there."

"Well, take our two mules and go and offer them to the monks instead; they ought to give you the preference."

"But then, how shall we go on?"

"On horseback, morbleu."

"Diable!"

"Oh! a good rider like you. You will find me again on the Grand Place." Chicot was bargaining for some horses, when he saw the monk re-appear, carrying the saddles and bridles of the mules.

"Oh! you have kept the harness?"

"Yes."

"And sold the mules?"

"For ten pistoles each."

"Which they paid you?"

"Here is the money."

"Ventre de biche! you are a great man, let us go on."

"But I am thirsty."

"Well, drink while I saddle the beasts, but not too much."

"A bottle."

"Very well."

Gorenflot drank two, and came to give the rest of the money back to Chicot, who felt half inclined to give it to him, but reflecting that if Gorenflot had money he would no longer be obedient, he refrained. They rode on, and the next evening Chicot came up with Nicolas David, still disguised as a lackey, and kept him in sight all the way to Lyons, whose gates they all three entered on the eighth day after their departure from Paris.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW CHICOT AND HIS COMPANION INSTALLED THEMSELVES AT THE HOTEL OF THE CROSS, AND HOW THEY WERE RECEIVED BY THE HOST.

CHICOT watched Nicolas David into the principal hotel of the place, and then said to Gorenflot, "Go in and bargain for a private room, say that you expect your brother, then come out and wait about for me, and I will come in when it is dark, and you can bring me straight to my room. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Choose a good room, as near as possible to that of the traveler who has just arrived; it must look on to the street, and on no account pronounce my name."

Gorenflot acquitted himself marvelously of the commission. Their room was only separated by a partition from that of Nicolas David.

"You deserve a recompense," said Chicot to him, "and you shall have sherry wine for supper."

"I never got tipsy on that wine; it would be agreeable."

"You shall to-night. But now ramble about the town."

"But the supper?"

"It shall be ready against your return; here is a crown meanwhile."

Gorenflot went off quite happy, and then Chicot made, with a gimlet, a hole in the partition at about the height of his eye. Through this, he could hear distinctly all that passed, and he could just see the host talking to Nicolas David, who was professing to have been sent on a mission by the king, to whom he professed great fidelity. The host did not reply, but Chicot fancied he could see an ironical smile on his lip whenever the king's name was mentioned.

"Is he a leaguer?" thought Chicot; "I will find out."

When the host left David he came to visit Chicot, who said, "Pray sit down, monsieur, and before we make a definitive arrangement, listen to my history. You saw me this morning with a monk?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Silence! that monk is proscribed."

"What! is he a disguised Huguenot?"

Chicot took an offended air. "Huguenot, indeed! he is my relation, and I have no Huguenot relations. On the contrary, he is so fierce an enemy of the Huguenots, that he has fallen into disgrace with his majesty Henri III., who protects them, as you know."

The host began to look interested. "Silence," said he.

"Why, have you any of the king's people here?"

"I fear so: there is a traveler in there."

"Then we must fly at once, for proscribed, menaced—"

"Where will you go?"

"We have two or three addresses given to us by an innkeeper we know, M. la Huriere."

"Do you know La Huriere?"

"Yes, we made his acquaintance on the night of St. Bartholomew."

"Well, I see you and your relation are holy people; I also know La Huriere. Then you say this monk—"

"Had the imprudence to preach against the Huguenots, and with so much success that the king wanted to put him in prison."——"And then?"

"Ma foi! I carried him off."

"And you did well."

"M. de Guise offered to protect him."

"What! the great Henri?"

"Himself; but I feared civil war."

"If you are friends of M. de Guise, you know this;" and he made a sort of masonic sign by which the leaguers recognized each other.

Chicot, who had seen both this and the answer to it twenty times during that famous night, replied, "And you this?"

"Then," said the innkeeper, "you are at home here; my house is yours, look on me as a brother, and if you have no money—"

Chicot drew out his purse. The sight of a well-filled purse is always agreeable, even to a generous host.

"Our journey," continued Chicot, "is paid for by the treasurer of the Holy Union, for we travel to propagate the faith. Tell us of an inn where we may be safe."

"Nowhere more so than here, and if you wish it, the other traveler shall turn out."

"Oh! no; it is better to have your enemies near, that you may watch them. But what makes you think he is our enemy?"

"Well! first he came disguised as a lackey, then he put on an advocate's dress, and I am sure he is no more an advocate than he is a lackey, for I saw a long rapier under his cloak. Then, he avowed he had a mission from the king!"

"From Herod, as I call him."

"Sardanapalus."

"Bravo!"

"Ah! I see we understand each other."

"Then we are to remain here?"

"I should think so."

"Not a word about my relation."

"Of course not."

"Nor of me."

"Oh, no! But hush! here is some one."

"Oh, it is the worthy man himself!"

The host turned to Gorenflot, and made the sign of the leaguers. Gorenflot was struck with terror and astonishment.

"Reply, my brother," said Chicot; "he is a member."

"Of what?"

"Of the Holy Union," said Bernouillet, in a low tone.

"You see all is safe; reply," said Chicot.

Gorenflot replied, to the great joy of the innkeeper.

"But," said Gorenflot, who did not like the conversation, "you promised me some sherry."

"Sherry, Malaga, Alicant—every wine in my cellar is at your disposal."

Gorenflot looked at Chicot in amazement.

For three following days Gorenflot got drunk, first on sherry, next on Malaga, then on Alicant; afterward, he declared he liked Burgundy best, and returned to that. Meanwhile, Chicot had never stirred from his room, and had constantly watched Nicolas David, who, having appointed to meet Pierre de Gondy at this inn, would not leave the house. On the morning of the sixth day he declared

himself ill, and the next day worse. Bernouillet came joyfully to tell Chicot.

"What! do you think him in danger?"

"High fever, my dear brother; he is delirious, and tried to strangle me and beat my servants. The doctors do not understand his complaint."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes; I tell you he tried to strangle me."

"How did he seem?"

"Pale and furious, and constantly crying out."

"What?"

"Take care of the king! they want to hurt the king! Then he constantly says that he expects a man from Avignon, and wishes to see him before he dies."

As for Gorenflot, he grew visibly fatter every day, so much so, that he announced to Chicot with terror one day that the staircase was narrowing. Neither David, the League, nor religion occupied him; he thought of nothing but how to vary his dinner and wine, so that Bernouillet often exclaimed in astonishment, "To think that that man should be a torrent of eloquence!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW THE MONK CONFESSED THE ADVOCATE, AND THE ADVOCATE THE MONK.

At last M. Bernouillet came into Chicot's room, laughing immoderately.

"He is dying," said he, "and the man has arrived from Avignon."

"Have you seen him?"

"Of course."——"What is he like?"

"Little and thin."

"It is he," thought Chicot; and he said, "Tell me about his arrival."

"An hour ago I was in the kitchen, when I saw a great horse, ridden by a little man, stop before the door. 'Is M. Nicolas here?' asked he. 'Yes, monsieur,' said I. 'Tell him that the person he expects from Avignon is here.' 'Certainly, monsieur, but I must warn you that he is very ill.' 'All the more reason for doing my bidding at once.' 'But he has a malignant fever.' 'Oh, pray, then, be quick!' 'How! you persist?' 'I persist.' 'In spite of the danger!' 'In spite of everything I must see him.' So I took him to the room, and there he is now. Is it not odd?"

"Very droll."

"I wish I could hear them."

"Go in."

"He forbade me to go in, saying he was going to confess."

"Listen at the door."

Bernouillet went, and Chicot went also to his hole: but they spoke so low that he could hear nothing, and in a few minutes Gondy rose and took leave. Chicot ran to the window, and saw a lackey waiting with a horse, which M. de Gondy mounted and rode off.

"If he only has not carried off the genealogy. Never mind, I shall soon catch him if necessary; but I suspect it is left here. Where can Gorenflot be?"

M. Bernouillet returned, saying, "He is gone."

"The confessor?"

"He is no more a confessor than I am."

"Will you send me my brother as soon as he comes in."

"Even if he be drunk?"

"Whatever state he is in."

Bernouillet went, and Chicot remained in a state of indecision as to what to do, for he thought, "If David is really so ill, he may have sent on the dispatches by Gondy." Presently he heard Gorenflot's voice, singing a drinking song as he came up the stairs.

"Silence, drunkard!" said Chicot.

"Drunkard, indeed!"

"Yes; but come here and speak seriously, if you can."

"What is it now?"

"It is, that you never think of the duties of your profession, that you wallow in greediness and drunkenness, and let religion go where it pleases."

Gorenflot looked astonished.

"I!" he gasped.

"Yes, you; you are disgraceful to see; you are covered with mud; you have been drunk in the streets."

"It is too true!"

"If you go on so, I will abandon you."

"Chicot, my friend, you will not do that? Am I very guilty?"

"There are archers at Lyons."

"Oh, pity! my dear protector, pity!"

"Are you a Christian or not?"

"I not a Christian!"

"Then do not let a neighbor die without confession."

"I am ready, but I must drink first, for I am thirsty."

Chicot passed him a jug of water, which he emptied.

"Now, who am I to confess?"

"Our unlucky neighbor who is dying."

"Let them give him a pint of wine with honey in it."

"He needs spiritual aid as well as temporal. Go to him."

"Am I fit?" said Gorenflot, timidly.

"Perfectly."

"Then I will go."

"Stay; I must tell you what to do."

"Oh! I know."

"You do not know what I wish."

"What you wish?"

"If you execute it well, I will give you one hundred pistoles to spend here."

"What must I do?"

"Listen; your robe gives you authority; in the name of God and the king, summon him to give up the papers he has just received from Avignon."

"What for?"

"To gain one hundred pistoles, stupid."

"Ah! true; I go."

"Wait a minute. He will tell you he has confessed."

"But if he has?"

"Tell him he lies; that the man who has just left him is no confessor, but an intriguer like himself."

"But he will be angry."

"What does that matter, since he is dying?"

"True."

"Well; one way or the other, you must get hold of those papers."

"If he refuses?"

"Refuse him absolution, curse him, anathematize him—"

"Oh, I will take them by force."

"Good; and when you have got them, knock on the wall."

"And if I cannot get them?"

"Knock also."

"Then, in any case I am to knock?"

"Yes."

Gorenflot went, and Chicot placed his ear to the hole in the wall. When Gorenflot entered. the sick man raised himself in his bed, and looked at him with wonder.

"Good-day, brother," said Gorenflot.

"What do you want, my father?" murmured the sick man, in a feeble voice.

"My son, I hear you are in danger, and I come to speak to you of your soul."

"Thank you, but I think your care is needless; I feel better."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"It is a ruse of Satan, who wishes you to die without confession."

"Then he will be deceived, for I have just confessed."

"To whom?"

"To a worthy priest from Avignon."

"He was not a priest."

"Not!"——"No."

"How do you know?"

"I knew him."

"You knew the man who has just gone?"

"Yes; and as you are not better, and this man was not a priest, you must confess."

"Very well," replied the patient, in a stronger voice, "but I will choose to whom I will confess."

"You will have no time to send for another priest, and I am here."

"How! no time, when I tell you I am getting well?"

Gorenflot shook his head. "I tell you, my son, you are condemned by the doctors and by Providence; you may think it cruel to tell you so, but it is what we must all come to sooner or later. Confess, my son, confess."

"But I assure you, father, that I feel much stronger."

"A mistake, my son, the lamp flares up at the last, just before it goes out. Come, confess all your plots, your intrigues, and machinations!"

"My intrigues and plots!" cried David, frightened at this singular monk, whom he did not know, but who seemed to know him so well.

"Yes; and when you have told all that, give me up the papers, and perhaps God will let me absolve you."

"What papers?" cried the sick man, in a voice as strong as though he were quite well.

"The papers that the pretended priest brought you from Avignon."

"And who told you that he brought me papers?" cried the patient, putting one leg out of bed.

Gorenflot began to feel frightened, but he said firmly, "He who told me knew well what he was saying; give me the papers, or you shall have no absolution."

"I laugh at your absolution," cried David, jumping out of bed, and seizing Gorenflot by the throat, "and you shall see if I am too ill to strangle you."

Gorenflot was strong, and he pushed David back so violently that he fell into the middle of the room. But he rose furious, and seizing a long sword, which hung on the wall behind his clothes, presented it to the throat of Gorenflot, who sank on a chair in terror.

"It is now your turn to confess," said he, "speak, or you die."

"Oh!" cried Gorenflot, "then you are not ill—not dying."

"It is not for you to question, but to answer."

"To answer what?"

"Who are you?"

"You can see that."

"Your name?"

"Brother Gorenflot."

"You are then a real monk?"

"I should think so."

"What brings you to Lyons?"

"I am exiled."

"What brought you to this inn?"

"Chance."

"How long have you been here?"

"A fortnight."

"Why did you watch me?"

"I did not."

"How did you know I had the papers?"

"Because I was told so."

"Who told you?"

"He who sent me here."

"Who was that?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You must."

"Oh! oh! I will cry out."

"And I will kill."

Gorenflot cried out, and a spot of blood appeared on the point of the sword.

"His name?" cried David.

"Oh! I can hold out no more."

"Speak."

"It was Chicot."

"The king's jester!"

"Himself."

"And where is he?"

"Here!" cried a voice, and Chicot appeared at the door with a drawn sword in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW CHICOT USED HIS SWORD.

NICOLAS DAVID, in recognizing him whom he knew to be his mortal enemy, could not repress a movement of terror, during which Gorenflot slipped a little to the side, crying out, "Help, friend! come to my aid!"

"Ah, Monsieur David, it is you!" said Chicot; "I am delighted to meet you again!" Then, turning to Gorenflot, he said, "My good Gorenflot, your presence as monk was very necessary just now, when we believed monsieur dying; but now that he is so well, it is with me he must deal; therefore, do me the favor to stand sentinel on the threshhold, and prevent any one from coming in to interrupt our little conversation." Gorenflot, who asked no better than to go, was soon out of the room; but David, having now recovered from his surprise, and confident in his skill as a swordsman, stood waiting for Chicot, with his sword in his hand and a smile on his lips.

"Dress yourself, monsieur," said Chicot; "I do not wish to take any advantage of you. Do you know what I have come to seek in this room?"

"The rest of the blows which I have owed you on account of the Duc de Mayenne, since that day when you jumped so quickly out of the window."

"No, monsieur; I know the number, and will return them. Be easy. What I have come for is a certain genealogy which M. Pierre de Gondy took to Avig-

non, without knowing what he carried, and, equally in ignorance, brought back to you just now."

David turned pale. "What genealogy?" he said.

"That of M. de Guise, who descends, as you know, in a direct line from Charlemagne."

"Ah, you are a spy! I thought you only a buffoon."

"Dear M. David, I will be both if you wish it: a spy to hang you, and a buffoon to laugh at it after."

"To hang me!"

"High and dry, monsieur; I hope you do not lay claim to be beheaded like a gentleman."

"And how will you do it?"

"Oh, very easily; I will relate the truth, for I must tell you, dear M. David. that I assisted last month at the meeting held in the convent of St. Genevieve."

"You!"

"Yes; I was in the confessional in front of yours, and it was very uncomfortable there, especially as I was obliged to wait to go out until all was finished. Therefore I heard all, saw the coronation of M. d'Anjou, which was not very amusing; but then the genealogy was delightful."

"Ah! you know about the genealogy?" cried David, biting his lips with anger.

"Yes, and I found it very ingenious, especially that part about the Salic law; only it is a misfortune to have so much intellect, one gets hanged for it; therefore, feeling myself moved with tender pity for so ingenious a man, I said to myself, 'Shall I let this brave M. David be hanged?' and I took the resolution of traveling with, or rather behind, you. I followed you, therefore, not without trouble, and at last we arrived at Lyons. I entered the hotel an hour after you, and have been in the adjoining room; look, there is only a partition between, and, as you may imagine, I did not travel all the way from Paris to Lyons to lose sight of you now. I pierced a little hole, through which I had the pleasure of watching you when I liked, and I confess I gave myself this pleasure several times a day. At last you fell ill; the host wished to get rid of you, but you were determined to wait here for M. de Gondy. I was duped by you at first, for you might really have been ill, so I sent you a brave monk, to excite you to repentance; but, hardened sinner that you are, you tried to kill him, forgetting the Scripture maxim, 'He who strikes with the sword shall perish with the sword.' Then I came to you, and said, 'We are old friends; let us arrange the matter.'"

"In what manner?"

"It would be a pity that such a man as you should disappear from the world; give up plots, trust to me, break with the Guises, give me your papers, and, on the faith of a gentleman, I will make your peace with the king."

"While, on the contrary, if I do not give them to you?"

"Ah! then, on the faith of a gentleman, I will kill you! But if you give them to me, all shall be forgotten. You do not believe me, perhaps, for your nature is bad, and you think my resentment can never be forgotten. But, although it is true that I hate you, I hate M. de Mayenne more; give me what will ruin him, and I will save you. And then, perhaps, you will not believe this either, for you love nothing; but I love the king, foolish and corrupted as he is, and I wish that he should reign tranquilly—which is impossible with the Mayennes and the genealogies of Nicolas David. Therefore, give me up the genealogy, and I promise to make your name and your fortune."

David never moved.

"Well," said Chicot, "I see all that I say to you is but wasted breath; therefore I go to get you hanged. Adieu, M. David," and he stepped backward toward the door.

"And you think I shall let you go out," cried the advocate. "No, no, my fine spy; no, no, Chicot, my friend, those who know of the genealogy must die. Those who menace me must die."

"You put me quite at my ease; I hesitated only because I am sure to kill you. Crillon, the other day, taught me a particular thrust, only one, but that will suffice. Come, give me the papers, or I will

kill you; and I will tell you how—I will pierce your throat just where you wished to bleed Gorenflot."

Chicot had hardly finished, when David rushed on him with a savage laugh. The two adversaries were nearly matched in height, but Chicot, who fenced nearly every day with the king, had become one of the most skillful swordsmen in the kingdom. David soon began to perceive this, and he retreated a step.

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot, "now you begin to understand. Once more; the papers."

David, for answer, threw himself again upon Chicot, and a new combat ensued. At last Chicot called out—

"Here is the thrust," and as he spoke he thrust his rapier half through his throat.

David did not reply, but fell at Chicot's feet, pouring out a mouthful of blood. But by a natural movement he tried to drag himself toward his bed, so as to defend his secret to the last.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, "I thought you cunning, but I see you are a fool. I did not know where the papers were, and you have shown me"—and while David rolled in the agonies of death, he ran to the bed, raised the mattress, and found under it a roll of parchment. At the moment in which he unrolled it to see if it was the document he sought, David raised himself in a rage and then fell back dead. Chicot saw with joy that he held what he wanted. The pope had written at the bottom, "*Fiat ut voluit Deus; Deus jura hominum fecit.*" After placing it in his breast, he took the body of the advocate, who had died without losing more blood, the nature of the wound making him bleed inwardly, put it back in the bed, turned the face to the wall, and, opening the door, called Gorenflot.

"How pale you are!" said the monk, as he entered.

"Yes, the last moments of that man caused me some emotion."

"Then he is dead?"——"Yes."

"He was so well just now."

"Too well; he swallowed something difficult of digestion, and died of it."

"The wretch wanted to strangle me, a holy man, and he is punished for it."

"Pardon him, you are a Christian."

"I do, although he frightened me much."

"You must do more; you must light the lamps, and say some prayers by his bed."

"Why?"

"That you may not be taken prisoner as his murderer."

"I, a murderer! it was he who tried to murder me."

"Mon Dieu! yes, and as he could not succeed, his rage made him break a blood-vessel. But till your innocence is established they might annoy you much."

"I fear you are right."

"Then do what I tell you. Install yourself here, and recite all the prayers you know, or do not know; then, when evening comes, go out and call at the ironmonger's at the corner of the street. There you will find your horse; mount him, and take the road to Paris; at Villeneuve-le-Roi sell him, and take Panurge back."

"Ah! that good Panurge; I shall be delighted to see him again. But how am I to live?"

Chicot drew from his pocket a handful of crowns and put them into the large hand of the monk.

"Generous man!" cried Gorenflot. "Let me stay with you at Lyons; I love Lyons."

"But I do not stay here; I set off at once, and travel too rapidly for you to follow me."

"So be it, then."

Chicot installed the monk by the bed, and went downstairs to the host.

"M. Bernouillet," said he, "a great event has taken place in your house."

"What do you mean?"

"The hateful royalist, the enemy of our religion upstairs, received to-day a messenger from Rome."

"I know that: it was I who told you."

"Well, our holy father, the pope, had sent him to this conspirator, who, however, probably did not suspect for what purpose."

"And why did he come?"

"Go upstairs, lift up the bedclothes, look at his neck, and you will see."

"You frighten me."

"I say no more. The pope did you honor in choosing your house for the scene of his vengeance."

Then Chicot put ten crowns into the hand of the host, and went down to the stable to get out the horses. M. Bernouillet went up and found Gorenflot praying. He looked as directed and found the wound.

"May every enemy of our religion die thus," said he to Gorenflot.

"Amen," replied the monk.

These events passed about the same time that Bussy brought the Baron de Meridor back to his daughter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU LEARNED THAT DIANA WAS NOT DEAD.

THE month of April had arrived. The great cathedral of Chartres was hung with white, and the king was standing barefooted in the nave. The religious ceremonies, which were for the purpose of praying for an heir to the throne of France, were just finishing, when Henri, in the midst of the general silence, heard what seemed to him a stifled laugh. He turned round to see if Chicot were there, for he thought no one else would have dared to laugh at such a time. It was not, however, Chicot who had laughed at the sight of the two chemises of the Holy Virgin which were said to have such a prolific power, and which were just being drawn from their golden box; but it was a cavalier who had just stopped at the door of the church, and who was making his way with his muddy boots through the crowd of courtiers in their penitents' robes and sacks. Seeing the king turn, he stopped for a moment, and Henri, irritated at seeing him arrive thus, threw an angry glance at him. The newcomer, however, continued to advance until he reached the velvet chair of M. le Duc d'Anjou, by which he knelt down. He, turning round, said, "Bussy!"

"Good-morning, monseigneur."

"Are you mad?"

"Why so?"

"To come here to see this nonsense."

"Monseigneur, I wish to speak to you at once."

"Where have you been for the last three weeks?"

"That is just what I have to tell you."

"Well, you must wait until we leave the church."

"So much the worse."

"Patience, here is the end."

Indeed, the king was putting on one of these chemises, and the queen another. Then they all knelt down, and afterward the king, taking off his holy tunic, left the church.

"Now, monseigneur," said Bussy, "shall we go to your house?"

"Yes, at once, if you have anything to tell me."

"Plenty of things which you do not expect."

When they were in the hotel the duke said, "Now sit down and tell me all; I feared you were dead."

"Very likely, monseigneur."

"You left me to look after my beautiful unknown. Who is this woman, and what am I to expect?"

"You will reap what you have sown, monseigneur—plenty of shame."

"What do you mean?" cried the duke.

"What I said."

"Explain yourself, monsieur; who is this woman?"

"I thought you had recognized her."

"Then it was her?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"And she spoke to you?"

"Certainly. Doubtless you had reason to think her dead, and you perhaps hoped she was so."

The duke grew pale.

"Yes, monseigneur," continued Bussy, "although you pushed to despair a young girl of noble race, she escaped from death; but do not breathe yet, do not think yourself absolved, for, in preserving her life, she found a misfortune worse than death."

"What is it? what has happened to her?"

"Monseigneur, a man preserved her honor and saved her life, but he made her pay for this service so dearly that she regrets his having rendered it.

"Finish."

"Well, monseigneur, Mademoiselle de Meridor, to escape becoming the mistress of the Duc d'Anjou, has thrown herself into the arms of a man whom she detests, and is now Madame de Monsoreau."

At these words the blood rushed furiously into the duke's face.

"Is this true?" said he.

"Pardieu! I said it," said Bussy, haughtily.

"I did not mean that; I did not doubt your word, Bussy, I wondered only if it were possible that one of my gentlemen had had the audacity to interfere between me and a woman whom I honored with my love."——"And why not?"

"Then you would have done so?"

"I would have done better; I would have warned you that your honor was being lost."

"Listen, Bussy," said the prince, becoming calmer, "I do not justify myself, but M. de Monsoreau has been a traitor toward me."

"Toward you?"

"Yes, he knew my intentions."

"And they were?"

"To try and make Diana love me."

"Love you!"

"Yes, but in no case to use violence."

"Those were your intentions?" said Bussy, with an ironical smile.

"Certainly, and these intentions I preserved to the last, although M. de Monsoreau constantly combated them."

"Monseigneur, what do you say! This man incited you to dishonor Diana?"

"Yes."——"By his counsels?"

"By his letters. Would you like to see them?"

"Oh! if I could believe that!"

"You shall see."

And the duke, opening a little cabinet, and taking out a letter, said, "Since you doubt your prince's words, read."

Bussy took it and read:

"MONSEIGNEUR—

"Be quite easy; the coup-de-main can be executed without risk, for the young person sets off this evening to pass a week with an aunt who lives at the chateau of Lude: I charge myself with it, and you need take no trouble. As for the scruples of the young lady, be sure that they will vanish in the presence of your highness: meanwhile I act; and this evening she will be at the chateau of Beauge.

"Your highness's respectful servant,

"BRYAN DE MONSOREAU."

"Well, what do you say, Bussy?"

"I say that you are well served, monseigneur."

"You mean betrayed."

"Ah, true; I forgot the end."

"The wretch! he made me believe in the death of a woman—"

"Whom he stole from you; it is black enough."

"How did he manage?"

"He made the father believe you the ravisher, and offered himself to rescue the lady, presented himself at the chateau of Beauge with a letter from the Baron de Meridor, brought a boat to the window, and carried away the prisoner; then shut her up in the house you know of, and by constantly working upon her fears, forced her to become his wife."

"Is it not infamous?"

"Only partly excused by your conduct, monseigneur."

"Ah! Bussy, you shall see how I will revenge myself!"

"Princes do not revenge themselves, they punish," said Bussy.

"How can I punish him?"

"By restoring happiness to Madame de Monsoreau."

"But can I?"

"Certainly."

"How?"

"By restoring her to liberty. The marriage was forced, therefore it is null."

"You are right."

"Get it set aside, then, and you will have acted like a gentleman and a prince."

"Ah, ah!" said the prince, "what

warmth! you are interested in it, Bussy."

"I! not at all, except that I do not wish people to say that Louis de Clermont serves a perfidious prince and a man without honor."

"Well, you shall see. But how to do it?"

"Nothing more easy; make her father act."

"But he is buried in Anjou."

"Monseigneur, he is here in Paris."

"At your house?"

"No, with his daughter. Speak to him, monseigneur, that he may see in you, not what he does now, an enemy, but a protector—that he who now curses your name may bless you."

"And when can I see him?"

"As soon as you return to Paris."

"Very well."

"It is agreed, then?"

"Yes."

"On your word as a gentleman?"

"On my faith as a prince."

"And when do you return?"

"This evening; will you accompany me?"

"No, I go first; where shall I meet your highness?"

"To-morrow, at the king's levée."

"I will be there, monseigneur."

Bussy did not lose a moment, and the distance that took the duke fifteen hours to accomplish, sleeping in his litter, the young man, who returned to Paris, his heart beating with joy and love, did in five, to console the baron and Diana the sooner.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW CHICOT RETURNED TO THE LOUVRE, AND WAS RECEIVED BY THE KING, HENRI III.

ALL was quiet at the Louvre, for the king, fatigued with his pilgrimage, had not yet risen, when two men presented themselves together at the gates.

"M. Chicot," cried the younger, "how are you this morning?"

"Ah, M. de Bussy."

"You come for the king's levée, monsieur?"

"And you also, I presume?"

"No; I come to see M. le Duc d'Anjou. You know I have not the honor of being a favorite of his majesty's."

"The reproach is for the king, and not for you."

"Do you come from far? I heard you were traveling."

"Yes, I was hunting. And you?"

"Yes, I have been in the provinces; and now will you be good enough to render me a service?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Well, you can penetrate into the Louvre, while I remain in the antechamber; will you tell the duke I am waiting for him?"

"Why not come in with me?"

"The king would not be pleased."

"Bah!"

"Diable! he has not accustomed me to his most gracious smiles."

"Henceforth, for some time, all that will change."

"Ah, ah! are you a necromancer, M. Chicot?"

"Sometimes; come, take courage, and come in with me."

They entered together; one went toward the apartments of the Duc d'Anjou, and the other to those of the king.

Henri was just awake, and had rung, and a crowd of valets and friends had rushed in; already the chicken broth and the spiced wine were served, when Chicot entered, and without saying a word, sat down to eat and drink.

"Par la mordieu!" cried the king, delighted, although he affected anger; "it is that knave of a Chicot, that fugitive, that vagabond!"

"What is the matter, my son?" said Chicot, placing himself on the immense seat, embroidered with fleurs-de-lis, on which the king was seated.

"Here is my misfortune returned," said Henri; "for three weeks I have been so tranquil."

"Bah! you always grumble. One would think you were one of your own subjects. Let me hear, Henriquet, how you have governed this kingdom in my absence."

"Chicot!"

"Have you hanged any of your curled gentlemen? Ah! pardon, M. Quelus, I did not see you."

"Chicot, I shall be angry," said the king; but he ended by laughing, as he always did; so he went on: "But what has become of you? Do you know that I have had you sought for in all the bad parts of Paris?"

"Did you search the Louvre?"

Just then M. de Monsoreau entered.

"Ah! it is you, monsieur," said the king; "when shall we hunt again?"

"When it shall please your majesty; I hear there are plenty of wild boars at St. Germain en Laye."

"The wild boar is dangerous," said Chicot; "King Charles IX., I remember, was nearly killed by one. And then spears are sharp also; is it not so, Henri? and do you know your chief huntsman must have met a wolf not long ago?"

"Why so?"

"Because he has caught the likeness; it is striking."

M. de Monsoreau grew pale, and turning to Chicot, said:

"M. Chicot, I am not used to jesters, having lived little at court, and I warn you that before my king I do not like to be humiliated, above all when I speak of my duties."

"Well, monsieur," said Chicot, "we are not like you, we court people laughed heartily at the last joke."

"And what was that?"

"Making you chief huntsman."

Monsieur looked daggers at Chicot.

"Come, come," said Henri, "let us speak of something else."

"Yes, let us speak of the merits of Notre-Dame de Chartres."

"Chicot, no impiety."

"I, impious! it is you, on the contrary; there were two chemises accustomed to be together, and you separated them. Join them together and a miracle may happen."

This allusion to the estrangement of the king and queen made every one laugh.

Monsoreau then whispered to Chicot, "Pray withdraw with me into that window, I wish to speak to you." When they were alone, he went on, "Now, M. Chicot, buffoon as you are, a gentleman forbids you; do you understand? forbids you to laugh at him, and to remember that others may finish what M. de Mayenne began."

"Ah! you wish me to become your creditor, as I am his, and to give you the same place in my gratitude."

"It seems to me that, among your creditors, you forget the principal."

"Indeed, I have generally a good memory. Who may it be?"

"M. Nicolas David."

"Oh! you are wrong; he is paid."

At this moment Bussy entered.

"Monsieur," said he to the count, "M. le Duc d'Anjou desires to speak with you."

"With me?"

"With you, monsieur."

"Do you accompany me?"

"No, I go first, to tell the duke you are coming," and he rapidly disappeared.

"Well?" said the duke.

"He is coming."

"And he suspects nothing?"

"Nothing; but if he did, what matter? is he not your creature? Does he seem to you less guilty than he did yesterday?"

"No, a hundred times more so."

"He has carried off, by treason, a noble young girl, and married her equally treasonably; either he must ask for the dissolution of the marriage himself, or you must do it for him."

"I have promised."

"I have your word?

"You have."

"Remember that they know and are anxiously waiting."

"She shall be free, Bussy; I pledge my word."

Bussy kissed the hand which had signed so many false promises. As he did so, M. de Monsoreau entered, and Bussy went to the corridor, where were several other gentlemen. Here he had to wait as patiently as might be for the result of this interview, on which all his future happiness was at stake. He waited for some time, when suddenly the door of the duke's room opened, and the sound of M. de Mon-

soreau's voice made Bussy tremble, for it sounded almost joyful. Soon the voices approached, and Bussy could see M. de Monsoreau bowing and retiring, and he heard the duke say: "Adieu, my friend."

"'My friend!'" murmured Bussy.

Then Monsoreau said, "Your highness agrees with me that publicity is best?"

"Yes, yes; an end to all mysteries."

"Then this evening I will present her to the king."

"Do so; I will prepare him."

"Gentlemen," then said Monsoreau, turning toward those in the corridor, "allow me to announce to you a secret; monseigneur permits me to make public my marriage with Mademoiselle Diana de Meridor, who has been my wife for more than a month, and whom I intend this evening to present to the court."

Bussy, who had been hidden behind a door, staggered, and almost fell at this unexpected blow. However, he darted a glance of contempt at the duke, toward whom he made a step, but he, in terror, shut his door, and Bussy heard the key turn in the lock. Feeling that if he stayed a moment longer he should betray before every one the violence of his grief, he ran downstairs, got on his horse, and galloped to the Rue St. Antoine. The baron and Diana were eagerly waiting for him, and they saw him enter pale and trembling.

"Madame," cried he, "hate me, despise me; I believed I could do something and I can do nothing. Madame, you are now the recognized wife of M. de Monsoreau, and are to be presented this evening. I am a fool—a miserable dupe, or rather, as you said, M. le Baron, the duke is a coward and a villain."

And leaving the father and daughter overcome with grief, he rushed wildly away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN M. DE MONSOREAU AND THE DUKE.

It is time to explain the duke's sudden change of intention with regard to M. de Monsoreau. When he first received him, it was with dispositions entirely favorable to Bussy's wishes.

"Your highness sent for me?" said Monsoreau.

"You have nothing to fear, you who have served me so well, and are so much attached to me. Often you have told me of the plots against me, have aided my enterprises, forgetting your own interests, and exposing your life."

"Your highness—"

"Even lately, in this last unlucky adventure—"

"What adventure, monseigneur?"

"This carrying off of Mademoiselle de Meridor—poor young creature!"

"Alas!" murmured Monsoreau.

"You pity her, do you not?" said the duke.

"Does not your highness?"

"I! you know how I have regretted this fatal caprice. And, indeed, it required all my friendship for you, and the remembrance of all your good services, to make me forget that without you I should not have carried off this young girl."

Monsoreau felt the blow. "Monseigneur," said he, "your natural goodness leads you to exaggerate; you no more caused the death of this young girl than I did."

"How so?"

"You did not intend to use violence to Mademoiselle de Meridor."

"Certainly not."

"Then the intention absolves you; it is a misfortune, nothing more."

"And besides," said the duke, looking at him, "death has buried all in eternal silence."

The tone of his voice and his look struck Monsoreau. "Monseigneur," said he, after a moment's pause, "shall I speak frankly to you?"

"Why should you hesitate?" said the prince, with astonishment mingled with hauteur.

"Indeed, I do not know, but your highness has not thought fit to be frank with me."

"Really!" cried the duke, with an angry laugh.

"Monseigneur, I know what your highness meant to say to me."

"Speak, then."

"Your highness wished to make me understand that perhaps Mademoiselle de Meridor was not dead, and that therefore those who believed themselves her murderers might be free from remorse."

"Oh, monsieur, you have taken your time before making this consoling reflection to me. You are a faithful servant, on my word; you saw me sad and afflicted, you heard me speak of the wretched dreams I had since the death of this woman, and you let me live thus, when even a doubt might have spared me so much suffering. How must I consider this conduct, monsieur?"

"Monseigneur, is your highness accusing me?"

"Traitor!" cried the duke, "you have deceived me; you have taken from me this woman whom I loved—"

Monsoreau turned pale, but did not lose his proud, calm look. "It is true," said he.

"True, knave!"

"Please to speak lower, monseigneur; your highness forgets that you speak to a gentleman and an old servant."

The duke laughed.

"My excuse is," continued he, "that I loved Mademoiselle de Meridor ardently."

"I, also," replied Francois, with dignity.

"It is true, monseigneur; but she did not love you."

"And she loved you?"——"Perhaps."

"You lie! you know you lie! You used force as I did; only I, the master, failed, while you, the servant, succeeded by treason."

"Monseigneur, I loved her."

"What do I care?"

"Monseigneur, take care. I loved her, and I am not a servant. My wife is mine, and no one can take her from me, not even the king. I wished to have her, and I took her."

"You took her! Well! you shall give her up."

"You are wrong, monseigneur. And do not call," continued he, stopping him, "for if you call once—if you do me a public injury—"

"You shall give up this woman."

"Give her up! she is my wife before God—"

"If she is your wife before God, you shall give her up before men. I know all, and I will break this marriage, I tell you. To-morrow, Mademoiselle de Meridor shall be restored to her father; you shall set off into the exile I impose on you; you shall have sold your place; these are my conditions, and take care, or I will break you as I break this glass." And he threw down violently a crystal cup.

"I will not give up my wife, I will not give up my place, and I will remain in France," replied Monsoreau.

"You will not?"

"No, I will ask my pardon of the king of France—of the king anointed at the Abbey of St. Genevieve; and this new sovereign will not, I am sure, refuse the first request proffered to him." Francois grew deadly pale, and nearly fell.

"Well, well," stammered he, "this request, speak lower—I listen."

"I will speak humbly, as becomes the servant of your highness. A fatal love was the cause of all. Love is the most imperious of the passions. To make me forget that your highness had cast your eyes on Diana, I must have been no longer master of myself."

"It was a treason."

"Do not overwhelm me, monseigneur; I saw you rich, young and happy, the first Christian prince in the world. For you are so, and between you and supreme rank there is now only a shadow easy to dispel. I saw all the splendor of your future, and, comparing your proud position with my humble one, I said, 'Leave to the prince his brilliant prospects and splendid projects, scarcely will he miss the pearl that I steal from his royal crown.'"

"Comte! comte!"

"You pardon me, monseigneur, do you not?"

At this moment the duke raised his eyes and saw Bussy's portrait on the wall. It seemed to exhort him to courage, and he said, "No, I cannot pardon you; it is not for myself that I hold out, it is because a father in mourning—a father unworthily deceived—cries out for his daughter; because a woman, forced to marry you, cries

for vengeance against you; because, in a word, the first duty of a prince is justice."

"Monseigneur, if justice be a duty, gratitude is not less so; and a king should never forget those to whom he owes his crown. Now, monseigneur, you owe your crown to me."

"Monsoreau!" cried the duke, in terror.

"But I cling to those only who cling to me."

"I cannot—you are a gentleman, you know I cannot approve of what you have done. My dear count, this one more sacrifice; I will recompense you for it; I will give you all you ask."

"Then your highness loves her still!" cried Monsoreau, pale with jealousy.

"No, I swear I do not."

"Then, why should I? I am a gentleman; who can enter into the secrets of my private life?"

"But she does not love you."

"What matter."

"Do this for me, Monsoreau."

"I cannot."

"Then—" commenced the duke, who was terribly perplexed.

"Reflect, sire."

"You will denounce me?"

"To the king dethroned for you, yes; for if my new king destroyed my honor and happiness, I would return to the old."

"It is infamous."

"True, sire; but I love enough to be infamous."

"It is cowardly."

"Yes, your majesty, but I love enough to be cowardly. Come, monseigneur, do something for the man who has served you so well."

"What do you want?"

"That you should pardon me."

"I will."

"That you should reconcile me with M. de Meridor."

"I will try."

"That you will sign my marriage contract with Mademoiselle de Meridor."

"Yes," said the prince, in a hoarse voice.

"And that you shall honor my wife with a smile when I shall present her to his majesty."

"Yes; is that all?"

"All, monseigneur."

"You have my word."

"And you shall keep the throne to which I have raised you.—There remains now, only," thought Monsoreau, "to find out who told the duke."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHICOT AND THE KING.

THAT same evening M. de Monsoreau presented his wife in the queen's circle. Henri, tired, had gone to bed, but after sleeping three or four hours, he woke, and feeling no longer sleepy, proceeded to the room where Chicot slept, which was the one formerly occupied by St. Luc; Chicot slept soundly, and the king called him three times before he woke. At last he opened his eyes and cried you, "What is it?"

"Chicot, my friend, it is I."

"You; who?"

"I, Henri."

"Decidedly, my son, the pheasants must have disagreed with you; I warned you at supper, but you would eat so much of them, as well as of those crabs."

"No; I scarcely tasted them."

"Then you are poisoned, perhaps. Ventre de biche! how pale you are!"

"It is my mask," said the king.

"Then you are not ill?"

"No."

"Then why wake me?"

"Because I am annoyed."

"Annoyed! if you wake a man at two o'clock in the morning, at least you should bring him a present. Have you anything for me?"

"No; I come to talk to you."

"That is not enough."

"Chicot, M. de Morvilliers came here last evening."

"What for?"

"To ask for an audience. What can he want to say to me, Chicot?"

"What! is it only to ask that, that you wake me?"

"Chicot, you know he occupies himself with the police."

"No; I did not know it."

"Do you doubt his watchfulness?"

"Yes, I do, and I have my reasons."

"What are they?"

"Will one suffice you?"

"Yes, if it be good."

"And you will leave me in peace afterward?"

"Certainly."

"Well, one day—no, it was one evening, I beat you in the Rue Foidmentel; you had with you Quelus and Schomberg."

"You beat me?"

"Yes, all three of you."

"How, it was you! wretch!"

"I, myself," said Chicot, rubbing his hands, "do I not hit hard?"

"Wretch!"

"You confess, it was true?"

"You know it is, villain."

"Did you send for M. de Morvilliers the next day?"

"You know I did, for you were there when he came."

"And you told him the accident that had happened to one of your friends?"

"Yes."

"And you ordered him to find out the criminal?"

"Yes."

"Did he find him?"——"No."

"Well, then, go to bed, Henri; you see your police is bad." And, turning round, Chicot refused to say another word, and was soon snoring again.

The next day the council assembled. It consisted of Quelus, Maugiron, D'Epernon, and Schomberg. Chicot, seated at the head of the table, was making paper boats, and arranging them in a fleet. M. de Morvilliers was announced, and came in, looking grave.

"Am I," said he, "before your majesty's council?"

"Yes, before my best friends; speak freely."

"Well, sire, I have a terrible plot to denounce to your majesty."

"A plot!" cried all.

"Yes, your majesty."

"Oh, is it a Spanish plot?"

At this moment the Duc d'Anjou, who had been summoned to attend the council, entered.

"My brother," said Henri, "M. de Morvilliers comes to announce a plot to us."

The duke threw a suspicious glance round him. "Is it possible?" he said.

"Alas, yes, monseigneur," said M. de Morvilliers.

"Tell us all about it," said Chicot.

"Yes," stammered the duke, "tell us all about it, monsieur."

"I listen," said Henri.

"Sire, for some time I have been watching some malcontents, but they were shopkeepers, or junior clerks, a few monks and students."

"That is not much," said Chicot.

"I know that malcontents always make use either of war or of religion."

"Very sensible!" said the king.

"I put men on the watch, and at last I succeeded in persuading a man from the provostry of Paris to watch the preachers, who go about exciting the people against your majesty. They are prompted by a party hostile to your majesty, and this party I have studied, and now I know their hopes," added he triumphantly. "I have men in my pay, greedy, it is true, who, for a good sum of money, promised to let me know of the first meeting of the conspirators."

"Oh! never mind money, but let us hear the aim of this conspiracy."

"Sire, they think of nothing less than a second St. Bartholomew."

"Against whom?"

"Against the Huguenots."

"What have you paid for your secret?" said Chicot.

"One hundred and sixty thousand livres."

Chicot turned to the king, saying, "If you like, for one thousand crowns, I will tell you all the secrets of M. de Morvilliers."

"Speak."

"It is simply the League, instituted ten years ago; M. de Morvilliers has discovered what every Parisian knows as well as his *ave*."

"Monsieur," interrupted the chancellor.

"I speak the truth, and I will prove it," cried Chicot.

"Tell me, then, their place of meeting."

"Firstly, the public streets; secondly, the public streets."

"M. Chicot is joking," said the chancellor; "tell me their rallying sign."

"They are dressed like Parisians, and shake their legs when they walk."

A burst of laughter followed this speech; then M. de Morvilliers said, "They have had one meeting-place which M. Chicot does not know of."

"Where?" asked the king.

"The Abbey of St. Genevieve."

"Impossible!" murmured the duke.

"It is true," said M. de Morvilliers, triumphantly. —— "What did they decide?" asked the king.

"That the Leaguers should choose chiefs, that every one should arm, that every province should receive a deputy from the conspirators, and that all the Huguenots cherished by his majesty (that was their expression)—"

The king smiled.

"Should be massacred on a given day."

"Is that all?" said the duke.

"No, monseigneur."

"I should hope not," said Chicot; "if the king got only that for 160,000 livres, it would be a shame."

"There are chiefs—"

The Duc d'Anjou could not repress a start.

"What!" cried Chicot, "a conspiracy that has chiefs! how wonderful! But we ought to have more than that for 160,000 livres."

"Their names?" asked the king.

"Firstly, a fanatic preacher; I gave 10,000 livres for his name."

"Very well."

"A monk called Gorenflot."

"Poor devil!" said Chicot.

"Gorenflot?" said the king, writing down the name; "afterward—"

"Oh!" said the chancellor, with hesitation, "that is all." And he looked round as if to say, "If your majesty were alone, you should hear more."

"Speak, chancellor," said the king, "I have none but friends here."

"Oh! sire, I hesitate to pronounce such powerful names."

"Are they more powerful than I am?" cried the king.

"No, sire; but one does not tell secrets in public."

"Monsieur," said the Duc d'Anjou, "we will retire."

The king signed to the chancellor to approach him, and to the duke to remain. M. de Morvilliers had just bent over the king to whisper his communication, when a great clamor was heard in the court of the Louvre. The king jumped up, but Chicot, running to the window, called out, "It is M. de Guise entering the Louvre."

"The Duc de Guise," stammered the Duc d'Anjou.

"How strange that he should be in Paris," said the king, reading the truth in M. de Morvilliers' look. "Was it of him you were about to speak?" he asked.

"Yes, sire; he presided over the meeting."——"And the others?"

"I know no more."

"You need not write that name on your tablets! you will not forget it," whispered Chicot.

The Duc de Guise advanced, smiling, to see the king.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT M. DE GUISE CAME TO DO AT THE LOUVRE.

BEHIND M. de Guise there entered a great number of officers, courtiers, and gentlemen, and behind them a concourse of the people; an escort less brilliant, but more formidable, and it was their cries that had resounded as the duke entered the Louvre.

"Ah! it is you, my cousin," said the king; "what a noise you bring with you! Did I not hear the trumpets sound?"

"Sire, the trumpets sound in Paris only for the king, and in campaigns for the general. Here the trumpets would make too much noise for a subject; there they do not make enough for a prince."

Henri bit his lips. "Have you arrived from the siege of La Charite only to-day?"

"Only to-day, sire," replied the duke, with a heightened color.

"Ma foi! your visit is a great honor to us."

"Your majesty jests, no doubt. How can my visit honor him from whom all honor comes?"

"I mean, M. de Guise," replied Henri, "that every good Catholic is in the habit, on returning from a campaign, to visit God first in one of his temples—the king only comes second. 'Honor God, serve the king,' you know, my cousin."

The heightened color of the duke became now still more distinct; and the king, happening to turn toward his brother, saw with astonishment that he was as pale as the duke was red. He was struck by this emotion in each, but he said:

"At all events, duke, nothing equals my joy to see that you have escaped all the dangers of war, although you sought them, I was told, in the rashest manner; but danger knows you and flies you."

The duke bowed.

"But I must beg you, my cousin, not to be so ambitious of mortal perils, for you put to shame sluggards like us, who sleep, eat, and invent new prayers."

"Yes, sire," replied the duke, "we know you to be a pious prince, and that no pleasure can make you forget the glory of God and the interests of the Church. That is why we have come with so much confidence to your majesty."

"With confidence! Do you not always come to me with confidence, my cousin?"

"Sire, the confidence of which I speak refers to the proposition I am about to make to you."

"You have a proposition to make to me! Well, speak, as you say, with confidence. What have you to propose?"

"The execution of one of the most beautiful ideas which has been originated since the Crusades."

"Continue, duke."

"Sire, the title of Most Christian King is not a vain one; it makes an ardent zeal for religion imcumbent on its possessor."

"Is the Church menaced by the Saracens once more?"

"Sire, the great concourse of people who followed me, blessing my name, honored me with this reception only because of my zeal to defend the Church. I have already had the honor of speaking to your majesty of an alliance between all true Catholics."

"Yes, yes," said Chicot, "the League; ventre de biche, Henri, the League. By St. Bartholomew! how can you forget so splendid an idea, my son?"

The duke cast a disdainful glance on Chicot, while D'Anjou, who stood by, as pale as death, tried, by signs, to make the duke stop.

"Look at your brother, Henri," whispered Chicot.

"Sire," continued the Duc de Guise, "the Catholics have indeed called this association the Holy League, and its aim is to fortify the throne against the Huguenots, its mortal enemies; but to form an association is not enough, and in a kingdom like France, several millions of men cannot assemble without the consent of the king."

"Several millions!" cried Henri, almost with terror.

"Several millions!" repeated Chicot; "a small number of malcontents, which may bring forth pretty results."

"Sire," cried the duke, "I am astonished that your majesty allows me to be interrupted so often, when I am speaking on serious matters."

"Quite right," said Chicot; "silence there."

"Several millions!" repeated the king; "and against these millions, how many Huguenots are there in my kingdom?"

"Four," said Chicot.

This new sally made the king and his friends laugh, but the duke frowned, and his gentlemen murmured loudly.

Henri, becoming once more serious, said, "Well, duke, what do you wish? To the point."

"I wish, sire—for your popularity is dearer to me than my own—that your majesty should be superior to us in your zeal for religion—I wish you to choose a chief for the league."

"Well!" said the king, to those who surrounded him, "what do you think of it, my friends?"

Chicot, without saying a word, drew out a lion's skin from a corner, and threw himself on it.

"What are you doing, Chicot?" asked the king.

"Sire, they say that night brings good counsel; that must be because of sleep; therefore I am going to sleep, and to-morrow I will reply to my cousin Guise."

The duke cast a furious glance on Chicot, who replied by a loud snore.

"Well, sire!" said the duke, "what does your majesty say?"

"I think that, as usual, you are in the right, my cousin; convoke, then, your principal leaguers, come at their head, and I will choose the chief."

"When, sire?"

"To-morrow."

The Duc de Guise then took leave, and the Duc d'Anjou was about to do the same, when the king said—"Stay, my brother, I wish to speak to you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CASTOR AND POLLUX.

THE king dismissed all his favorites, and remained with his brother. The duke, who had managed to preserve a tolerably composed countenance throughout, believed himself unsuspected, and remained without fear.

"My brother," said Henri, after assuring himself that, with the exception of Chicot, no one remained in the room, "do you know that I am a very happy prince?"

"Sire, if your majesty be really happy, it is a recompense from Heaven for your merits."

"Yes, happy," continued the king, "for if great ideas do not come to me, they do to my subjects. It is a great idea which has occurred to my cousin Guise."

The duke made a sign of assent, and Chicot opened his eyes to watch the king's face.

"Indeed," continued Henri, "to unite under one banner all the Catholics, to arm all France on this pretext from Calais to Languedoc, from Bretagne to Burgundy, so that I shall always have an army ready to march against England, Holland, or Spain, without alarming any of them—do you know, Francois, it is a magnificent idea."

"Is it not, sire?" said the duke, delighted.

"Yes, I confess I feel tempted to reward largely the author of this fine project."

Chicot opened his eyes, but he shut them again, for he had seen on the face of the king one of his almost imperceptible smiles, and he was satisfied.

"Yes," continued Henri, "I repeat, such a project merits recompense, and I will do what I can for the author of this good work, for the work is begun—is it not, my brother?"

The duke confessed that it was.

"Better and better; my subjects not only conceive these good ideas, but, in their anxiety to be of use to me, hasten to put them in execution. But I ask you, my dear Francois, if it be really to the Duc de Guise that I am indebted for this royal thought?"

"No, sire, it occurred to the Cardinal de Lorraine twenty years ago, only the St. Bartholomew rendered it needless for the time."

"Ah! what a pity he is dead; but," continued Henri, with that air of frankness which made him the first comedian of the day, "his nephew has inherited it, and brought it to bear. What can I do for him?"

"Sire," said Francois, completely duped by his brother, "you exaggerate his merits. He has, as I say, but inherited the idea, and another man has given him great help in developing it."

"His brother the cardinal?"

"Doubtless he has been occupied with it, but I do not mean him."

"Mayenne, then?"

"Oh! sire, you do him too much honor."

"True, how could any good ideas come to such a butcher? But to whom, then, am I to be grateful for his aid to my cousin Guise?"

"To me. sire,"

"To you!" cried Henri, as if in astonishment. "How! when I saw all the world unchained against me, the preach-

ers against my vices, the poets against my weaknesses, while my friends laughed at my powerlessness, and my situation was so harassing that it gave me gray hairs every day: such an idea came to you, Francois—to you, whom I confess, for man is feeble and kings are blind, I did not always believe to be my friend! Ah! Francois, how guilty I have been." And Henri, moved even to tears, held out his hand to his brother.

Chicot opened his eyes again.

"Oh!" continued Henri, "the idea is triumphant. Not being able to raise troops without raising an outcry, scarcely to walk, sleep, or love, without exciting ridicule, this idea gives me at once an army, money, friends, and repose. But my cousin spake of a chief?"

"Yes, doubtless."

"This chief, you understand, Francois, cannot be one of my favorites; none of them has at once the head and the heart necessary for so important a post. Quelus is brave, but is occupied only by his amours. Maugiron is also brave, but he thinks only of his toilet. Schomberg also, but he is not clever. D'Epernon is a valiant man, but he is a hypocrite, whom I could not trust, although I am friendly to him. But you know, Froncois, that one of the heaviest taxes on a king is the necessity of dissimulation; therefore, when I can speak freely from my heart, as I do now, I breathe. Well, then, if my cousin Guise originated this idea, to the development of which you have assisted, the execution of it belongs to him."

"What do you say, sire?" said Francois, uneasily.

"I say, that to direct such a movement we must have a prince of high rank."

"Sire, take care."

"A good captain and a skillful negotiator."

"The last particularly."

"Well, is not M. de Guise all this?"

"My brother, he is very powerful already."

"Yes, doubtless; but his power makes my strength."

"He holds already the army and the bourgeois; the cardinal holds the Church, and Mayenne is their instrument; it is a great deal of power to be concentrated in one family."

"It is true, Francois; I had thought of that."

"If the Guises were French princes, their interest would be to aggrandize France."

"Yes, but they are Lorraines."

"Of a house always rival to yours."

"Yes, Francois; you have touched the sore. I did not think you so good a politician. Yes, there does not pass a day but one or other of these Guises, either by address or by force, carries away from me some particle of my power. Ah! Francois, if we had but had this explanation sooner, if I had been able to read your heart as I do now, certain of support in you, I might have resisted better, but now it is too late."——"Why so?"

"Because all combats fatigue me; therefore I must make him chief of the League."

"You will be wrong, brother."

"But who could I name, Francois? who would accept this perilous post? Yes, perilous; for do you not see that he intended me to appoint him chief, and that, should I name any one else to the post, he would treat him as an enemy?"

"Name some one so powerful that, supported by you, he need not fear all the three Lorraine princes together."

"Ah, my good brother, I know no such person."

"Look round you, brother."

"I know no one but you and Chicot who are really my friends."

"Well, brother."

Henri looked at the duke as if a veil had fallen from his eyes, "Surely you would never consent, brother! It is not you who could teach all these bourgeois their exercise, who could look over the discourses of the preachers, who, in case of battle, would play the butcher in the streets of Paris; for all this, one must be triple, like the duke, and have a right arm called Charles and a left called Louis. What! you would like all this? You, the first gentleman of our court! Mort de ma vie! how people change with the age!"

"Perhaps I would not do it for myself, brother, but I would do it for you."

"Excellent brother!" said Henri, wiping away a tear which never existed.

"Then," said the duke, "it would not displease you for me to assume this post?"

"Displease me! On the contrary, it would charm me."

Francois trembled with joy. "Oh! if your majesty thinks me worthy of this confidence."

"Confidence! When you are the chief, what have I to fear? The League itself? That cannot be dangerous, can it, Francois?"

"Oh, sire!"

"No, for then you would not be chief, or at least, when you are chief, there will be no danger. But, Francois, the duke is doubtless certain of this appointment, and he will not lightly give way."

"Sire, you grant me the command?"

"Certainly."

"And you wish me to have it?"

"Particularly; but I dare not too much displease M. de Guise."

"Oh, make yourself easy, sire; if that be the only obstacle, I pledge myself to arrange it."

"When?"

"At once."

"Are you going to him? That will be doing him too much honor."

"No, sire; he is waiting for me."

"Where?"

"In my room."

"Your room! I heard the cries of the people as he left the Louvre."

"Yes; but after going out at the great door he came back by the postern. The king had the right to the first visit, but I to the second."

"Ah, brother, I thank you for keeping up our prerogative, which I have the weakness so often to abandon. Go, then, Francois, and do your best."

Francois bent down to kiss the king's hand, but he, opening his arms, gave him a warm embrace, and then the duke left the room to go to his interview with the Duc de Guise. The king, seeing his brother gone, gave an angry growl, and rapidly made his way through the secret corridor, until he reached a hiding-place whence he could distinctly hear the conversation between the two dukes.

"Ventre de biche!" cried Chicot, starting up, "how touching these family scenes are! For an instant I believed myself in Olympus, assisting at the reunion of Castor and Pollux after six months' separation."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT LISTENING IS THE BEST WAY TO HEAR.

THE Duc d'Anjou was well aware that there were few rooms in the Louvre which were not built so that what was said in them could be heard from the outside; but, completely seduced by his brother's manner, he forgot to take any precautions.

"Why, monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "how pale you are!"

"Visibly?"

"Yes, to me."

"The king saw nothing?"

"I think not; but he retained you?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say, monseigneur?"

"He approves the idea, but the more gigantic it appears, the more he hesitates to place a man like you at the head."

"Then we are likely to fail."

"I fear so, my dear duke; the League seems likely to fail."

"Before it begins."

At this moment Henri, hearing a noise, turned and saw Chicot by his side, listening also. "You followed me, knave!" said he.

"Hush, my son," said Chicot; "you prevent me from hearing."

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "it seems to me that in this case the king would have refused at once. Does he wish to dispossess me?"

"I believe so."

"Then he would ruin the enterprise?"

"Yes; but I aided you with all my power."

"How, monseigneur?"

"In this—the king has left me almost master, to kill or reanimate the League."

"How so?" cried the duke, with sparkling eyes.

"Why, if, instead of dissolving the League, he named me chief—"

"Ah!" cried the duke, while the blood mounted to his face.

"Ah! the dogs are going to fight over their bones," said Chicot; but to his surprise, and the king's, the Duc de Guise suddenly became calm, and exclaimed, in an almost joyful tone:

"You are an adroit politician, monseigneur, if you did this."

"Yes, I did; but I would not conclude anything without speaking to you."

"Why so, monseigneur?"

"Because I did not know what it would lead us to."

"Well, I will tell you, monseigneur, not to what it will lead us—that God alone knows—but how it will serve us. The League is a second army, and as I hold the first, and my brother the Church, nothing can resists us as long as we are united."

"Without counting," said the Duc d'Anjou, "that I am heir presumptive to the throne."

"True, but still calculate your bad chances."

"I have done so a hundred times."

"There is, first, the king of Navarre."

"Oh! I do not mind him; he is entirely occupied by his amours with La Fosseuse."

"He, monseigneur, will dispute every inch with you; he watches you and your brother; he hungers for the throne. If any accident should happen to your brother, see if he will not be here with a bound from Pau to Paris."

"An accident to my brother," repeated Francois.

"Listen, Henri," said Chicot.

"Yes, monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "an accident. Accidents are not rare in your family; you know that, as well as I do. One prince is in good health, and all at once he falls ill of a lingering malady; another is counting on long years, when, perhaps, he has but a few hours to live."

"Do you hear, Henri?" said Chicot, taking the hand of the king, who shuddered at what he heard.

"Yes, it is true," said the Duc d'Anjou, "the princes of my house are born under fatal influences; but my brother Henri is, thank God, strong and well; he supported formerly the fatigues of war, and now that his life is nothing but recreation—"

"Yes; but, monseigneur, remember one thing; these recreations are not always without danger. How did your father, Henri II., die, for example? He, who also had happily escaped the dangers of war. The wound by M. de Montgomery's lance was an accident. Then your poor brother, Francois, one would hardly call a pain in the ears an accident, and yet it was one; at least, I have often heard it said that this mortal malady was poured into his ear by some one well known."

"Duc!" murmured Francois, reddening.

"Oh, yes, monseigneur; the name of king has long brought misfortune with it. Look at Antoine de Bourbon, who died from a spot in the shoulder. Then there was Jeanne d'Albret, the mother of the Béarnais, who died from smelling a pair of perfumed gloves, an accident very unexpected, although there were people who had great interest in this death. Then Charles IX., who died neither by the eye, the ear, nor the shoulder, but by the mouth—"

"What do you say?" cried Francois, starting back.

"Yes, monseigneur, by the mouth. Those hunting books are very dangerous, of which the pages stick together, and can only be opened by wetting the finger constantly."

"Duke! duke! I believe you invent crimes."

"Crimes! who speaks of crimes? I speak of accidents. Was it not also an accident that happened to Charles IX. at the chase? You know what chase I mean; that of the boar, where, intending to kill the wild boar, which had turned on your brother, you, who never before had missed your aim, did so then, and the king would have been killed, as he had fallen from his

horse, had not Henri of Navarre slain the animal which you had missed."

"But," said the Duc d'Anjou, trying to recover himself, "what interest could I have had in the death of Charles IX., when the next king would be Henri III.?"

"Oh! monseigneur, there was already one throne vacant, that of Poland. The death of Charles IX. would have left another, that of France; and even the kingdom of Poland might not have been despised. Besides, the death of Charles would have brought you a degree nearer the throne, and the next accident would have benefited you."

"What do you conclude from all this, duke?" said the Duc d'Anjou.

"Monseigneur, I conclude that each king has his accident, and that you are the inevitable accident of Henri III., particularly if you are chief of the League."

"Then I am to accept?"

"Oh! I beg you to do so."

"And you?"

"Oh! be easy; my men are ready, and to-night Paris will be curious."

"What are they going to do in Paris to-night?" asked Henri.

"Oh! how foolish you are, my friend; to-night they sign the League publicly."

"It is well," said the Duc d'Anjou, "till this evening then."

"Yes, till this evening," said Henri.

"How!" said Chicot, "you will not risk going into the streets to-night?"

"Yes, I shall."

"You are wrong, Henri; remember the accidents."

"Oh! I shall be well accompanied; will you come with me?"

"What! do you take me for a Huguenot? I shall go and sign the League ten times. However, Henri, you have a great advantage over your predecessors, in being warned, for you know your brother, do you not?"

"Yes, and, mordieu! before long he shall find it out."

CHAPTER XL.

THE EVENING OF THE LEAGUE.

PARIS presented a fine sight, as through its then narrow streets thousands of people pressed toward the same point, for at eight o'clock in the evening, M. le Duc de Guise was to receive the signatures of the bourgeois to the League. A crowd of citizens, dressed in their best clothes, as for a fete, but fully armed, directed their steps toward the churches. What added to the noise and confusion was that large numbers of women, disdaining to stay at home on such a great day, had followed their husbands, and many had brought with them a whole batch of children. It was in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec that the crowd was the thickest. The streets were literally choked, and the crowd pressed tumultuously toward a bright light suspended below the sign of the Belle Etoile.

On the threshold a man, with a cotton cap on his head and a naked sword in one hand and a register in the other, was crying out, "Come, come, brave Catholics, enter the hotel of the Belle Etoile, where you will find good wine; come, to-night the good will be separated from the bad, and to-morrow morning the wheat will be known from the tares; come, gentlemen, you who can write, come and sign;—you who cannot write, come and tell your names to me, La Huriere; vive la messe!" A tall man elbowed his way through the crowd, and in letters half an inch high, wrote his name, 'Chicot.' Then, turning to La Huriere, he asked if he had not another register to sign. La Huriere did not understand raillery, and answered angrily. Chicot retorted, and a quarrel seemed approaching, when Chicot, feeling some one touch his arm, turned and saw the king disguised as a simple bourgeois, and accompanied by Quelus and Maugiron, also disguised, and carrying an arquebuse on their shoulders.

"What!" cried the king, "good Catholics disputing among themselves; par la mordieu, it is a bad example."

"Do not mix yourself with what does not concern you," replied Chicot, without seeming to recognize him. But a new influx of the crowd distracted the attention of La Huriere, and separated the king and his companions from the hotel.

"Why are you here, sire?" said Chicot.

"Do you think I have anything to fear?"

"Eh! mon Dieu! in a crowd like this it is so easy for one man to put a knife into his neighbor, and who just utters an oath and gives up the ghost."

"Have I been seen?"

"I think not; but you will be if you stay longer. Go back to the Louvre, sire."

"Oh! oh! what is this new outcry, and what are the people running for?"

Chicot looked, but could at first see nothing but a mass of people crying, howling, and pushing. At last the mass opened, and a monk, mounted on a donkey, appeared. The monk spoke and gesticulated, and the ass brayed.

"Ventre de Biche!" cried Chicot, "listen to the preacher."

"A preacher on a donkey!" cried Quelus.

"Why not?"

"He is Silenus," said Maugiron.

"Which is the preacher?" said the king, "for they speak both at once."

"The underneath one is the most eloquent," said Chicot, "but the one at the top speaks the best French; listen, Henri."

"My brethren," said the monk, "Paris is a superb city; Paris is the pride of France, and the Parisians a fine people." Then he began to sing, but the ass mingled his accompaniment so loudly that he was obliged to stop. The crowd burst out laughing.

"Hold your tongue, Panurge, hold your tongue," cried the monk, "you shall speak after, but let me speak first."

The ass was quiet.

"My brothers," continued the preacher, "the earth is a valley of grief, where man often can quench his thirst only with his tears."

"He is drunk," said the king.

"I should think so."

"I, who speak to you," continued the monk, "I am returning from exile like the Hebrews of old, and for eight days Panurge and I have been living on alms and privations."

"Who is Panurge?" asked the king.

"The superior of his convent, probably; but let me listen."

"Who made me endure this? It was Herod; you know what Herod I speak of. I and Panurge have come from Villeneuve-le-Roi, in three days, to assist at this great solemnity; now we see, but we do not understand. What is passing, my brothers? Is it to-day that they depose Herod? Is it to-day that they put brother Henri in a convent?—Gentlemen," continued he, "I left Paris with two friends; Panurge, who is my ass, and Chicot, who is his majesty's jester. Can you tell me what has become of my friend Chicot?"

Chicot made a grimace.

"Oh," the king, "he is your friend." Quelus and Maugiron burst out laughing. "He is handsome and respectable," continued the king.

"It is Gorenflot of whom M. de Morvilliers spoke to you."

"The incendiary of St. Genevieve?"

"Himself!"

"Then I will have him hanged!"

"Impossible!"

"Why?"——"He has no neck."

"My brothers," contiued Gorenflot, "I am a true martyr, and it is my cause that they defend at this moment, or, rather, that of all good Catholics. You do not know what is passing in the provinces, we have been obliged at Lyons to kill a Huguenot who preached revolt. While one of them remains in France, there will be no tranquillity for us. Let us exterminate them. To arms! to arms!"

Several voices repeated, "To arms!"

"Par la mordieu!" said the king, "make this fellow hold his tongue, or he will make a second St. Bartholomew!"

"Wait," said Chicot, and with his stick he struck Gorenflot with all his force on the shoulders.

"Murder!" cried the monk.

"It is you!" cried Chicot.

"Help me, M. Chicot, help me! The enemies of the faith wish to assassinate me, but I will not die without making my voice heard. Death to the Huguenots!"

"Will you hold your tongue?" cried Chicot. But at this moment a second blow fell on the shoulders of the monk with such force that he cried out with real pain. Chicot, astonished, looked

round him, but saw nothing but the stick. The blow had been given by a man who had immediately disappeared in the crowd after administering this punishment.

"Who the devil could it have been?" thought Chicot, and he began to run after the man, who was gliding away, followed by only one companion.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RUE DE LA FERRONNERIE.

CHICOT had good legs, and he would have made the best use of them to join the man who had beaten Gorenflot if he had not imagined that there might be danger in trying to recognize a man who so evidently wished to avoid it. He thought the best way not to seem to watch them was to pass them; so he ran on, and passed them at the corner of the Rue Tirechappe, and then hid himself at the end of the Rue des Bourdonnais. The two men went on, their hats slouched over their eyes, and their cloaks drawn up over their faces, with a quick and military step, until they reached the Rue de la Ferronnerie. There they stopped and looked round them. Chicot, who was still ahead, saw in the middle of the street, before a house so old that it looked falling to pieces, a litter, attached to which were two horses. The driver had fallen asleep, while a woman, apparently unquiet, was looking anxiously through the blind. Chicot hid himself behind a large stone wall, which served as stalls for the vegetable sellers on the days when the market was held in this street, and watched. Scarcely was he hidden, when he saw the two men approach the litter, one of whom, on seeing the driver asleep, uttered an impatient exclamation, while the other pushed him to awaken him. "Oh, they are compatriots!" thought Chicot. The lady now leaned out of the window, and Chicot saw that she was young, very pale, but very beautiful. The two men approached the litter, and the taller of the two took in both of his the little white hand which was stretched out to him.

"Well, ma mie," asked he, "how are you?"

"I have been very anxious," replied she.

"Why the devil did you bring madame to Paris?" said the other man rudely.

"Ma foi! it is a malediction that you must always have a petticoat tacked to your doublet!"

"Ah, dear Agrippa," replied the man who had spoken first, "it is so great a grief to part from one you love."

"On my soul, you make me swear to hear you talk! Did you come to Paris to make love? It seems to me that Béarn is large enough for your sentimental promenades, without continuing them in this Babylon, where you have nearly got us killed twenty times to-day. Go home, if you wish to make love, but, here, keep to your political intrigues, my master."

"Let him scold, ma mie, and never mind him; I think he would be ill if he did not."

"But, at least, ventre St. Gris, as you say, get into the litter, and say your sweet things to madame; you will run less risk of being recognized there than in the open street."

"You are right, Agrippa. Give me a place, ma mie, if you permit me to sit by your side."

"Permit, sire; I desire it ardently," replied the lady.

"Sire!" murmured Chicot, who, carried away by an impulse, tried to raise his head, and knocked it against the stone wall. Meanwhile the happy lover profited by the permission given, and seated himself in the litter.

"Oh! how happy I am," he cried, without attending in the least to the impatience of his friend—"ventre St. Gris, this is a good day. Here are my good Parisians, who execrate me with all their souls, and would kill me if they could, working to smooth my way to the throne, and I have in my arms the woman I love. Where are we, D'Aubigne? when I am king, I will erect here a statue to the genius of the Béarnais."

"The Béarn—" began Chicot, but he stopped, for he had given his head a second bump.

"We are in the Rue de la Ferronnerie, sire," said D'Aubigne, "and it does not smell nice."

"Get in then, Agrippa, and we will go on."

"Ma foi! no, I will follow behind; I should annoy you, and, what is worse, you would annoy me."

"Shut the door, then, bear of Béarn, and do as you like." Then to the coachman he said, "Lavarrenne, you know where."

The litter went slowly away, followed by D'Aubigne.

"Let me see," said Chicot, "must I tell Henri what I have seen? Why should I? two men and a woman, who hide themselves; it would be cowardly. I will not tell; that I know it myself is the important point, for is it not I who reign? His love was very pretty, but he loves too often, this dear Henri of Navarre. A year ago it was Madame de Sauve, and I suppose this was La Fosseuse. However, I love the Béarnais, for I believe some day he will do an ill turn to those dear Guises. Well! I have seen every one to-day but the Duc d'Anjou; he alone is wanting to my list of princes. Where can my Francois III. be? Ventre de biche! I must look for the worthy monarch."

Chicot was not the only person who was seeking for the Duc d'Anjou, and unquiet at his absence. The Guises had also sought for him on all sides, but they were not more lucky than Chicot. M. d'Anjou was not the man to risk himself imprudently, and we shall see afterward what precautions had kept him from his friends. Once Chicot thought he had found him in the Rue Bethisy; a numerous group was standing at the door of a wine-merchant; and in this group Chicot recognized M. de Monsoreau and M. de Guise, and fancied that the Duc d'Anjou could not be far off. But he was wrong. MM. de Monsoreau and Guise were occupied in exciting still more an orator in his stammering eloquence. This orator was Gorenflot, recounting his journey to Lyons, and his duel in an inn with a dreadful Huguenot. M. de Guise was listening intently, for he began to fancy it had something to do with the silence of Nicolas David. Chicot was terrified; he felt sure that in another moment Gorenflot would pronounce his name, which would throw a fatal light on the mystery. Chicot in an instant cut the bridles of some of the horses that were fastened up, and giving them each a violent blow, sent them galloping among the crowd, which opened, and began to disperse in different directions. Chicot passed quickly through the groups, and approaching Gorenflot, took Panurge by the bridle and turned him round. The Duc de Guise was already separated from them by the rush of the people, and Chicot led off Gorenflot to a kind of cul-de-sac by the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

"Ah! drunkard!" said he to him, "ah! traitor! you will then always prefer a bottle of wine to your friend."

"Ah! M. Chicot," stammered the monk.

"What! I feed you, wretch, I give you drink, I fill your pockets and your stomach, and you betray me."

"Ah! M. Chicot!"

"You tell my secrets, wretch."

"Dear friend."

"Hold your tongue; you are but a sycophant, and deserve punishment."

And the monk, vigorous and strong, powerful as a bull, but overcome by wine and repentance, remained without defending himself in the hands of Chicot, who shook him look a balloon full of air.

"A punishment to me, to your friend, dear M. Chicot!"

"Yes, to you," said Chicot, striking him over the shoulders with his stick.

"Ah! if I were but fasting."

"You would beat me, I suppose; I, your friend."

"My friend! and you treat me thus!"

"He who loves well, chastises well," said Chicot, redoubling his proofs of friendship. "Now," said he, "go and sleep at the Corne d'Abondance."

"I can no longer see my way," cried the monk, from whose eyes tears were falling.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "if you wept for the wine you have drunk! However, I will guide you."

And taking the ass by the bridle, he led him to the hotel, where two men assisted

Gorenflot to dismount, and led him up to the room which our readers already know.

"It is done," said the host, returning.

"He is in bed?"

"Yes, and snoring."

"Very well. But as he will awake some day or other, remember that I do not wish that he should know how he came here; indeed, it will be better that he should not know that he has been out since the famous night when he made such a noise in the convent, and that he should believe that all that has passed since is a dream."

"Very well, M. Chicot; but what has happened to the poor monk?"

"A great misfortune. It appears that at Lyons he quarreled with an agent of M. de Mayenne's and killed him."

"Oh! mon Dieu!"

"So that M. de Mayenne has sworn that he will have him broken on the wheel."

"Make yourself easy, monsieur; he shall not go out from here on any pretext."

"Good. And now," said Chicot, as he went away, "I must find the Duc d'Anjou."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRINCE AND THE FRIEND.

We may remember that the Duc de Guise had invited the Duc d'Anjou to meet him in the streets of Paris that evening. However, he determined not to go out of his palace unless he was well accompanied; therefore the duke went to seek his sword, which was Bussy d'Amboise. For the duke to make up his mind to this step he must have been very much afraid; for since his deception with regard to M. de Monsoreau he had not seen Bussy, and stood in great dread of him. Bussy, like all fine natures, felt sorrow more vividly than pleasure; for it is rare that a man intrepid in danger, cold and calm in the face of fire and sword, does not give way to grief more easily than a coward. Those from whom a woman can draw tears most easily are those most to be feared by other men. Bussy had seen Diana received at court as Comtesse de Monsoreau, and as such admitted by the queen into the circle of her maids of honor; he had seen a thousand curious eyes fixed on her unrivaled beauty. During the whole evening he had fastened his ardent gaze on her, who never raised her eyes to him, and he, unjust, like every man in love, never thought how she must have been suffering from not daring to meet his sympathizing glance.

"Oh," said he to himself, seeing that he waited uselessly for a look, "women have skill and audacity only when they want to deceive a guardian, a husband, or a mother; they are awkward and cowardly when they have simply a debt of gratitude to pay, they fear so much to seem to love—they attach so exaggerated a value to their least favor, that they do not mind breaking their lover's heart, if such be their humor. Diana might have said to me frankly, 'I thank you for what you have done for me, but I do not love you.' The blow would have killed or cured me. But no; she prefers letting me love her hopelessly; but she has gained nothing by it, for I no longer love her, I despise her." And he went away with rage in his heart.

"I am mad," thought he, "to torment myself about a person who disdains me. But why does she disdain me, or for whom? Not, surely, for that long, livid-looking skeleton, who, always by her side, covers her incessantly with his jealous glances. If I wished it, in a quarter of an hour I could hold him mute and cold under my knee with ten inches of steel in his heart, and if I cannot be loved, I could at least be terrible and hated. Oh, her hatred! Rather than her indifference. Yes, but to act thus would be to do what a Quelus or a Maugiron would do if they knew how to love. Better to resemble that hero of Plutarch whom I so much admired, the young Antiochus, dying of love and never avowing it, nor uttering a complaint. Am I not called the brave Bussy?"

He went home and threw himself on a chair. How long he remained there he did not know, when a man approached him.

"M. le Comte," said he, "you are in a fever."

"Ah, is it you, Remy?"

"Yes, count. Go to bed."

Bussy obeyed, and all the next day Remy watched by him, with refreshing drinks for his body and kind words for his mind. But on the day after Bussy missed him.

"Poor lad!" thought he, "he was tired and wanted air; and then doubtless Gertrude expected him; she is but a femme-de-chambre, but she loves, and a femme-de-chambre who loves is better than a queen who does not."

The day passed, and Remy did not return. Bussy was angry and impatient. "Oh!" cried he, "I, who still believed in gratitude and friendship, will henceforth believe in nothing." Toward evening he heard voices in his antechamber, and a servant entered, saying, "It is Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou."

"Let him enter," said Bussy, frowning.

The duke, on entering the room, which was without lights, said, "It is too dark here, Bussy."

Bussy did not answer; disgust closed his mouth.

"Are you really ill," said the duke, "that you do not answer?"

"I am very ill."

"Then that is why I have not seen you for two days?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

The prince, piqued at these short answers, began to examine the room.

"You seem to me well lodged, Bussy," said he. Bussy did not reply.

"Bussy must be very ill," said the duke to an attendant who stood by, "why was not Miron called? The king's doctor is not too good for Bussy." When the servant was gone, "Are you in grief, Bussy?" said the duke.

"I do not know."

The duke approached, becoming more and more gracious as he was rebuffed. "Come, speak frankly, Bussy," said he.

"What am I to say, monseigneur?"

"You are angry with me?"

"I! for what? besides, it is no use to be angry with princes."

The duke was silent.

"But," said Bussy, "we are losing time in preambles; to the point, monseigneur. You have need of me, I suppose?"

"Ah, M. de Bussy!"

"Yes, doubtless; do you think I believe that you come here through friendship; you, who love no one?"

"Oh, Bussy, to say such things to me!"

"Well, be quick, monseigneur, what do you want? When one serves a prince, and he dissimulates to the extent of calling you his friend, one must pay for the dissimulation by being ready to sacrifice everything, even life, if necessary."

The duke colored, but it was too dark to see it. "I wanted nothing of you, Bussy, and you deceive yourself in thinking my visit interested. I desire only, seeing the fine evening, and that all Paris is out to sign the League, that you should accompany me a little about the streets."

Bussy looked at him. "Have you not Aurilly to go with you?"

"A lute-player!"

"Ah, monseigneur, you do not mention all his qualities; I believed that he fulfilled other functions for you. Besides, you have a dozen other gentlemen; I hear them in the antechamber."

At this moment the door opened. "Who is there?" said the duke, haughtily. "Who enters unannounced where I am?"

"I, Remy," replied the young man, without any embarrassment.

"Who is Remy?"

"The doctor, monseigneur," said the young man.

"And my friend," said Bussy. "You heard what monseigneur asks?" continued he, turning to Remy.

"Yes, that you should accompany him; but—"

"But what?" said the duke.

"But you cannot do it."

"And why so?" cried the duke.

"Because it is too cold out of doors."

"Too cold!" cried the duke, surprised that any one should oppose him.

"Yes, too cold. Therefore I, who answer for M. Bussy's life to himself and to

his friends, must forbid him to go out." And he pressed Bussy's hand in a significant manner.

"Very well," said the duke, "if the risk be so great, he must stay." And he turned angrily to the door; but returning to the bed, he said, "Then you have decided not to come?"

"Monseigneur, you hear that the doctor forbids me?"

"You ought to see Miron, he is a great doctor."

"I prefer my friend."

"Then adieu."

"Adieu, monseigneur."

No sooner was the duke gone than Remy said, "Now, monsieur, get up at once, if you please."

"What for?"

"To come out with me. This room is too warm."

"You said just now to the duke that it was too cold outside."

"The temperature has changed since."

"So that—" said Bussy, with curiosity.

"So that now I am convinced that the air will do you good."

"I do not understand."

"Do you understand the medicines I give you? Yet you take them. Come, get up; a walk with M. d'Anjou is dangerous, with me it is healthy. Have you lost confidence in me? If so, send me away."

"Well, as you wish it." And he rose, pale and trembling.

"An interesting paleness," said Remy.

"But where are we going?"

"To a place where I have analyzed the air to-day."

"And this air?"

"Is sovereign for your complaint, monsieur."

Bussy dressed, and they went out.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ETYMOLOGY OF THE RUE DE LA JUSSIENNE.

REMY took his patient by the arm, and led him by the Rue Coquilliere down to the rampart.

"It is strange," said Bussy, "you take me near the marsh of the Grange-Batelier, and call it healthy."

"Oh, monsieur, a little patience; we are going to turn round the Rue Pagavin, and get into the Rue Montmartre—you will see what a fine street that is."

"As if I did not know it."

"Well, so much the better; I need not lose time in showing you its beauties, and I will lead you at once into a pretty little street."

Indeed, after going a few steps down the Rue Montmartre, they turned to the right.

"This," said Remy, "is the Rue de la Gypecienne, or Egyptienne, which you like; often called by the people the Rue de la Gyssienne, or Jussienne."

"Very likely; but where are we going?"

"Do you see that little church?" said Remy. "How nicely it is situated; I dare say you never remarked it before."

"No, I did not know it."

"Well, now that you have seen the exterior, enter and look at the windows—they are very curious."

There was such a pleased smile on the young man's face, that Bussy felt sure there must have been some other reason for making him enter than to look at windows which it was too dark to see. The chapel was lighted, however, for service, and Remy began examining a fresco of the Virgin Mary, which was a continual source of complaint to the women who frequented the church, as they said that it attracted the attention of the young shopkeepers away from them.

"You had some other object in bringing me here than that I should admire the St. Marie, had you not?"

"Ma foi! no."

"Then let us go."

"Wait a moment; the service is finishing."

"Now let us go," said Bussy; "they are moving;" and he walked to the door.

"At least take some holy water."

Bussy obeyed, and Remy making a sign to a woman who stood near, she advanced, and Bussy grew suddenly pale, for he recognized Gertrude. She saluted him and passed on, but behind her came a figure which, although closely veiled, made his heart beat fast. Remy looked

at him, and Bussy knew now why he had brought him to this church. Bussy followed the lady, and Remy followed him. Gertrude had walked on before, until she came to an alley closed by a door. She opened it, and let her mistress pass. Bussy followed, and the two others disappeared.

It was half-past seven in the evening, and near the beginning of May; the air began to have the feeling of spring, and the leaves were beginning to unfold themselves. Bussy looked round him, and found himself in a little garden fifty feet square, surrounded by high walls covered with vines and moss. The first lilacs which had begun to open in the morning sun sent out their sweet emanations, and the young man felt tempted to think that so much perfume and warmth and life came to him only from the presence of the woman he loved so tenderly.

On a little wooden bench sat Diana, twisting in her fingers a sprig of wallflower, which she had picked, without knowing what she did. As Bussy approached her, she raised her head, and said timidly, "M. le Comte, all deception would be unworthy of us; if you found me at the church of St. Marie l'Egyptienne, it was not chance that brought you there."

"No, madame; Remy took me out without my knowing where I was going, and I swear to you that I was ignorant—"

"You do not understand me, monsieur. I know well that M. Remy brought you there, by force, perhaps."

"No, madame, not by force; I did not know that he was going to take me to see any one."

"That is a harsh speech," answered Diana, sadly, and with tears in her eyes. "Do you mean that had you known, you would not have come?"

"Oh, madame!"

"It would have been but just, monsieur; you did me a great service, and I have not thanked you. Pardon me, and receive all my thanks."

"Madame—" Bussy stopped; he felt so overcome, that he had neither words nor ideas.

"But I wished to prove to you," continued Diana, "that I am not ungrateful, nor forgetful. It was I who begged M. Remy to procure for me the honor of this interview; it was I who sought for it, forgive me if I have displeased you."

"Oh, madame! you cannot think that."

"I know," continued Diana, who was the strongest, because she had prepared herself for this interview, "how much trouble you had in fulfilling my commission; I know all your delicacy; I know it and appreciate it, believe me. Judge, then, what I must have suffered from the idea that you would misunderstand the sentiments of my heart."

"Madame, I have been ill for three days."

"Oh! I know," cried Diana, with a rising color, "and I suffered more than you, for M. Remy, he deceived me, no doubt; for he made me believe—"

"That your forgetfulness caused it. Oh! it is true."

"Then I have been right to do as I have done; to see you, to thank you for your kindness, and to swear to you an eternal gratitude. Do you believe that I speak from the bottom of my heart?"

Bussy shook his head sadly, and did not reply.

"Do you doubt my words?" said Diana.

"Madame, those who feel a kindness for you, show it when they can. You knew I was at the palace the night of your presentation, you knew I was close to you, you must have felt my looks fixed on you, and you never raised your eyes to me, you never let me know by a word, a sign, or a gesture, that you were aware of my presence; but perhaps you did not recognize me, madame, you have only seen me twice." Diana replied with so sad a glance of reproach that Bussy was moved by it.

"Pardon, madame," said he; "you are not an ordinary woman, and yet you act like them. This marriage—"

"I was forced to conclude it."

"Yes, but it was easy to break."

"Impossible, on the contrary."

"Did you not know that near you watched a devoted friend?"

"Even that made me fear."

"And you did not think of what my life would be, when you belonged to another. But perhaps you kept the name of Monsoreau from choice?"

"Do you think so?" murmured Diana; "so much the better." And her eyes filled with tears. Bussy walked up and down in great agitation.

"I am to become once more a stranger to you," said he.——"Alas!"

"Your silence says enough."

"I can only speak by my silence."

"At the Louvre you would not see me, and now you will not speak to me."

"At the Louvre I was watched by M. de Monsoreau, and he is jealous."

"Jealous! What does he want, then? mon Dieu! whose happiness can he envy, when all the world is envying his?"

"I tell you he is jealous; for the last two or three days he has seen some one wandering round our new abode."

"Then you have quitted the Rue St. Antoine?"

"How!" cried Diana thoughtlessly, "then it was not you?"

"Madame, since your marriage was publicly announced, since that evening at the Louvre, where you did not deign to look at me, I have been in bed, devoured by fever, so you see that your husband could not be jealous of me, at least."

"Well! M. le Comte, if it be true that you had any desire to see me, you must thank this unknown man; for knowing M. de Monsoreau as I know him, this man made me tremble for you, and I wished to see you and say to you, 'Do not expose yourself so, M. le Comte; do not make me more unhappy than I am."

"Reassure yourself, madame; it was not I."

"Now, let me finish what I have to say. In the fear of this man—whom I do not know, but whom M. de Monsoreau does perhaps—he exacts that I should leave Paris, so that," said Diana, holding out her hand to Bussy, "you may look upon this as our last meeting, M. le Comte. To-morrow we start for Meridor."

"You are going, madame?"

"There is no other way to reassure M. de Monsoreau; no other way for me to be at peace. Besides, I myself detest Paris, the world, the court, and the Louvre. I wish to be alone with my souvenirs of my happy past; perhaps a little of my former happiness will return to me there. My father will accompany me, and I shall find there M. and Madame de St. Luc, who expect me. Adieu, M. de Bussy."

Bussy hid his face in his hands. "All is over for me," he murmured.

"What do you say?" said Diana.

"I say, madame, that this man exiles you, that he takes from me the only hope left to me, that of breathing the same air as yourself, of seeing you sometimes, of touching your dress as you pass. Oh! this man is my mortal enemy, and if I perish for it, I will destroy him with my own hands."

"Oh! M. le Comte!"

"The wretch; it is not enough for him that you are his wife: you, the most beautiful and most charming of creatures, but he is still jealous. Jealous! The devouring monster would absorb the whole world!"

"Oh! calm yourself, comte; mon Dieu! he is excusable, perhaps."

"He is excusable! you defend him, madame?"

"Oh! if you knew!" cried Diana, covering her face with her hands.

"If I knew! Oh! madame, I know one thing; he who is your husband is wrong to think of the rest of the world."

"But!" cried Diana, in a broken voice, "if you were wrong, M. le Comte, and if he were not."

And the young woman, touching with her cold hand the burning ones of Bussy, rose and fled among the somber alleys of the garden, seized Gertrude's arm and dragged her away, before Bussy, astonished and overwhelmed with delight, had time to stretch out his arms to retain her. He uttered a cry and tottered; Remy arrived in time to catch him in his arms and make him sit down on the bench that Diana had just quitted.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW D'EPERNON HAD HIS DOUBLET TORN, AND HOW SCHOMBERG WAS STAINED BLUE.

WHILE M. la Huriere piled signature upon signature, while Chicot consigned Gorenflot to the Corne d'Abondance, while Bussy returned to life in the happy little garden full of perfume and love, the king, annoyed at all he had seen in the city, and furious against his brother, whom he had seen pass in the Rue St. Honore, accompanied by MM. de Guise and Monsoreau, and followed by a whole train of gentlemen, re-entered the Louvre, accompanied by Maugiron and Quelus. He had gone out with all four of his friends, but, at some steps from the Louvre, Schomberg and D'Epernon had profited by the first crush to disappear, counting on some adventures in such a turbulent night. Before they had gone one hundred yards D'Epernon had passed his sword-sheath between the legs of a citizen who was running, and who tumbled down in consequence, and Schomberg had pulled the cap off the head of a young and pretty woman. But both had badly chosen their day for attacking these good Parisians, generally so patient; for a spirit of revolt was prevalent in the streets, and the bourgeois rose, crying out for aid, and the husband of the young woman launched his apprentices on Schomberg. He was brave; therefore he stopped, put his hand on his sword, and spoke in a high tone. D'Epernon was prudent; he fled.

Henri had entered his room at the Louvre, and, seated in his great armchair, was trembling with impatience, and seeking a good pretext for getting into a passion. Maugiron was playing with Narcissus, the large greyhound, and Quelus was sitting near. "They go on!" cried Henri, "their plot advances; sometimes tigers, sometimes serpents; when they do not spring they glide."

"Oh, sire!" said Quelus, "are there not always plots in a kingdom? What the devil could all the sons, brothers, and cousins of kings do if they did not plot?" And Quelus irreverently turned his back to the king.

"Hear, Maugiron," said the king, "with what nonsense he tries to put me off."

"Well, sire, look at Narcissus; he is a good dog, but when you pull his ears, he growls, and when you tread on his toes he bites."

"Here is the other comparing me to my dog!"

"Not so, sire; I place Narcissus far above you, for he knows how to defend himself, and you do not." And he also turned his back.

"That is right," cried the king, "my good friends, for whom they accuse me of despoiling the kingdom, abandon me, insult me! Ah, Chicot! if you were here!"

At this moment, however, the door opened, and D'Epernon appeared, without hat or cloak, and with his doublet all torn.

"Bon Dieu!" cried Henri, "what is the matter?"

"Sire," said D'Epernon, "look at me; see how they treat the friends of your majesty."

"Who has treated you thus?"

"Mordieu, your people; or rather the people of M. le Duc d'Anjou, who cried, 'Vive la Messe!' 'Vive Guise!' 'Vive Francois!'—vive every one, in fact, except the king."

"And what did you do to be treated thus?"

"I? nothing. What can a man do to a people? They recognized me for your majesty's friend, and that was enough."

"But Schomberg?"

"Well?"

"Did he not come to your aid? did he not defend you?"

"Corbœuf! he had enough to do on his own account."

"How so?"

"I left him in the hands of a dyer whose wife's cap he had pulled off, and who, with his five or six apprentices, seemed likely to make him pass an unpleasant quarter of an hour."

"Par la mordieu! and where did you leave my poor Schomberg? I will go myself to his aid. They may say," continued he, looking at Maugiron and Quelus,

"that my friends abandon me, but they shall never say that I abandon them."

"Thanks, sire," said a voice behind Henri; "thanks, but here I am; I extricated myself without assistance; but, mein Gott! it was not without trouble."

"It is Schomberg's voice," cried all, "but where the devil is he?"

"Here I am," cried the voice; and indeed, in the corner of the room they saw something that looked not like a man but a shadow.

"Schomberg," cried the king, "where do you come from, and why are you that color?"

Indeed, Schomberg from head to foot was of a most beautiful blue.

"Der Teufel!" cried he, "the wretches! It is not wonderful that the people ran after me."

"But what is the matter?"

"The matter is, that they dipped me in a vat, the knaves; I believed that it was only water, but it was indigo."

"Oh, mordieu!" cried Quelus, bursting out laughing, "indigo is very dear; you must have carried away at least twenty crowns' worth of indigo."

"I wish you had been in my place."

"And you did not kill any one?"

"I left my poniard somewhere, that is all I know, up to the hilt in a sheath of flesh; but in a second I was taken, carried off, dipped in the vat, and almost drowned."

"And how did you get out of their hands?"

"By committing a cowardice, sire."

"What was that?"

"Crying, 'Vive la Ligue!'"

"That was like me; only they made me add, 'Vive le Duc d'Anjou!'" said D'Epernon.

"And I also," cried Schomberg; "but that is not all."

"What, my poor Schomberg, did they make you cry something else?"

"No, that was enough, God knows; but just as I cried 'Vive le Duc d'Anjou,' guess who passed?"

"How can I guess?"

"Bussy; his cursed Bussy, who heard me."

"He could not understand."

"Parbleu! it was not difficult to understand. I had a poniard at my throat, and I was in a vat."

"And he did not come to your rescue?"

"It seemed as though he was in a dreadful hurry; he scarcely seemed to touch the ground."

"Perhaps he did not recognize you, as you were blue."

"Ah! very likely."

"He would be excusable," said the king; "for, indeed, my poor Schomberg, I should hardly have known you myself."

"Never mind; we shall meet some other time, when I am not in a vat."

"Oh! as for me," said D'Epernon, "it is his master I should like to punish."

"The Duc d'Anjou, whose praises they are singing all over Paris," said Quelus.

"The fact is, that he is master of Paris to-night," said D'Epernon.

"Ah, my brother! my brother!" cried the king.

"Ah! yes, sire; you cry, 'my brother,' but you do nothing against him; and yet it is clear to me that he is at the head of some plot," said Schomberg.

"Eh, mordieu! that is what I was saying just before you came in, to these gentlemen, and they replied by shrugging their shoulders and turning their backs."

"Not because you said there was a plot, sire, but because you do nothing to suppress it."

"And now," said Quelus, "we say, 'Save us,' sire; or rather, save yourself; to-morrow M. de Guise will come to the Louvre, and ask you to name a chief for the League; if you name M. d'Anjou, as you promised, he, at the head of 100,000 Parisians, excited by this night, can do what he likes."

"Then," said Henri, "if I take a decisive step, you will support me?"

"Yes, sire."

"If, sire, you will only give me time to remodel my dress," said D'Epernon.

"Go to my room, D'Epernon; my valet-de-chambre will give you what you want."

"And I, sire, must have a bath," said Schomberg.

"Go to my bath."

"Then I may hope, sire, that my insult will not remain unavenged."

Henri remained silent a moment, and then said, "Quelus, ask if M. d'Anjou has returned to the Louvre."

Quelus went, but came back, and said that the duke had not yet returned.

"Well, you, Quelus and Maugiron, go down and watch for his entrance."

"And then?"

"Have all the doors shut."

"Bravo! sire."

"I will be back in ten minutes, sire," said D'Epernon.

"And my stay will depend on the quality of the dye," said Schomberg.

"Come as soon as possible," said the king.

The young men went out, and the king, left alone, kneeled down on his prie-Dieu.

CHAPTER LXV.

CHICOT MORE THAN EVER KING OF FRANCE.

THE gates of the Louvre were generally closed at twelve, but the king gave orders that they should be left open on this night till one. At a quarter to one Quelus came up. "Sire," said he, "the duke has come in."

"What is Maugiron doing?"

"Watching that he does not go out again."

"There is no danger."

"Then—"

"Let him go to bed quietly. Whom has he with him?"

"M. de Monsoreau and his ordinary gentlemen."

"And M. de Bussy?"

"No; he is not there."

"So much the better."

"What are your orders, sire?"

"Tell Schomberg and D'Epernon to be quick, and let M. de Monsoreau know that I wish to speak to him."

Five minutes after, Schomberg and D'Epernon entered; the former with only a slight blue tint left, which it would take several baths to eradicate, and the latter newly clothed. After them, M. de Monsoreau appeared. "The captain of the guards has just announced to me that your majesty did me the honor to send for me," said he.

"Yes, monsieur; when I was out this evening, I saw the stars so brilliant, and the moon so clear, that I thought it would be splendid weather for a chase to-morrow; so, M. le Comte, set off at once for Vincennes, and get a stag turned out ready for me."

"But, sire, I thought that to-morrow your majesty had given a rendezvous to Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou and M. de Guise, in order to name a chief for the League."

"Well, monsieur?" said the king haughtily.

"Sire, there might not be time."

"There is always time, monsieur, for those who know how to employ it; that is why I tell you to set off at once, so that you may have all ready for to-morrow morning at ten. Quelus, Schomberg, have the door of the Louvre opened for M. de Monsoreau, and have it closed behind him."

The chief huntsman retired in astonishment. "It is a whim of the king's," said he to the young men.

"Yes."

They watched him out, and then returned to the king.

"Now," said Henri, "silence and all four of you follow me."

"Where are we going, sire?" said D'Epernon.

"Those who follow will see."

The king took a lantern in his hand, and led the young men along the secret corridor which led to his brother's rooms. A valet-de-chambre watched here; but before he had time to warn his master, Henri ordered him to be silent, and the young men pushed him into a room and locked the door.

Henri opened his brother's door. Francois had gone to bed full of dreams of ambition, which the events of the evening had nourished: he had heard his name exalted and the king's abused. Conducted by the Duc de Guise, he had seen the Parisians open everywhere for him and his gentlemen, while those of the king were insulted and hooted. Never since the commencement of his career had he been

so popular, and consequently so hopeful. He had placed on the table a letter from M. de Guise, which had been brought to him by M. de Monsoreau. His surprise and terror were great when he saw the secret door open, and still more when he recognized the king. Henri signed to his companions to remain on the threshold, and advanced to the bed, frowning, but silent.

"Sire," stammered the duke, "the honor that your majesty does me is so unlooked for—"

"That it frightens you, does it not? But stay where you are, my brother; do not rise."

"But, sire, only — permit me—" and he drew toward him the letter of M. de Guise.

"You were reading?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire."

"Something interesting to keep you awake at this time of night?"

"Oh, sire, nothing very important; the evening courier—"

"Oh yes, I understand—Courier of Venus; but no, I see I am wrong—they do not seal billet-doux with seals of that size."

The duke hid the letter altogether.

"How discreet this dear Francois is!" said the king, with a smile which frightened his brother. However, making an effort to recover himself, he said:

"Did your majesty wish to say anything particular to me?"

"What I have to say to you, monsieur, I wish to say before witnesses. Here, gentlemen," continued he, turning to the four young men, "listen to us; I order you."

"Sire," said the duke, with a glance full of rage and hatred, "before insulting a man of my rank, you should have refused me the hospitality of the Louvre; in the Hotel d'Anjou, at least, I should have been free to reply to you."

"Really, you forget, then, that wherever you are, you are my subject; that I am the king, and that every house is mine."

"Sire, I am at the Louvre, at my mother's."

"And your mother is in my house. But to the point—give me that paper."

"Which?"

"That which you were reading, which was on your table, and which you hid when I came in."

"Sire, reflect."

"On what?"

"On this, that you are making a request unworthy of a gentleman, and fit only for a police-officer."

The king grew livid. "That letter, monsieur!"

"A woman's letter, sire."

"There are some women's letters very good to see, and dangerous not to see—such as those our mother writes."

"Brother!"

"This letter, monsieur!" cried the king, stamping his foot, "or I will have it torn from you by my Swiss!"

The duke jumped out of bed, with the letter crumpled in his hand, evidently with the intention of approaching the fire. But Henri, divining his intention, placed himself between him and the fire.

"You would not treat your brother thus?" cried the duke.

"Not my brother, but my mortal enemy. Not my brother, but the Duc d'Anjou, who went all through Paris with M. de Guise, who tries to hide from me a letter from one of his accomplices, the Lorraine princes."

"This time," said the duke, "your police are wrong."

"I tell you I saw on the seal the three merlets of Lorraine. Give it to me, mordieu! or—"

Henri advanced toward his brother and laid his hand on his shoulder. Francois had no sooner felt the touch of his hand than, falling on his knees, he cried out, "Help! help! my brother is going to kill me."

These words, uttered in an accent of profound terror, startled the king and mitigated his rage. The idea passed quickly through his mind that in their family, as by a curse, brother had always assassinated brother.

"No, my brother," said he, "you are wrong; I do not wish to hurt you, but

you cannot contend with me. I am the master, and if you did not know it before, you know it now."

"Yes, my brother, I acknowledge it."

"Very well, then give me that letter; the king orders it."

The duke let it fall, and the king picked it up, but without reading it put it in his pocket-book.

"Is that all?" said the duke, with his sinister glance.

"No, monsieur, you must keep your room until my suspicions with respect to you are completely dissipated. The room is commodious, and not much like a prison; stay here. You will have good company—at least, outside the door, for this night these four gentlemen will guard you; to-morrow they will be relieved by a guard of Swiss."

"But my friends—cannot I see them?"

"Who do you call your friends?"

"M. de Monsoreau, M. de Ribeirac, M. Antragues, and M. de Bussy."

"Oh, yes, he, of course."

"Has he had the misfortune to displease your majesty?"

"Yes."——"When, sire?"

"Always, but particularly to-night."

"To-night! what did he do?"

"Insulted me in the streets of Paris."

"You?"

"My followers, which is the same thing."

"Bussy! you have been deceived, sire."

"I know what I say."

"Sire, M. de Bussy has not been out of his hotel for two days. He is at home, ill in bed, burning with fever."

The king turned to Schomberg, who said, "If he had fever, at all events he had it in the Rue Coquilliere."

"Who told you he was there?" said the duke.

"I saw him."

"You saw Bussy out of doors!"

"Yes, looking well and happy, and accompanied by his ordinary follower, that Remy."

"Then I do not understand it; I saw him in bed myself; he must have deceived me."

"It is well; he will be punished with the rest," said the king.

"If M. de Bussy went out alone after refusing to go out with me—"

"You hear, gentlemen, what my brother says. But we will talk of him another time; now I recommend my brother to your care; you will have the honor of serving as guard to a prince of the blood."

"Oh! sire," said Quelus, "be satisfied; we know what we owe to M. le Duc."

"It is well; adieu, gentlemen."

"Sire," cried the duke, "am I really a prisoner, are my friends not to visit me, and am I not to go out?" And the idea of the next day presented itself to his mind, when his presence would be so necessary to M. de Guise. "Sire," cried he again, "let me at least remain near your majesty; it is my place, and I can be as well guarded there as elsewhere. Sire, grant me this favor."

The king was about to yield to this request and say, "Yes," when his attention was attracted to the door, where a long body, with its arms, its head, and everything that it could move, was making signs to him to say, "No." It was Chicot.

"No," said Henri to his brother; "you are very well here, and here you must stay."

"Sire—"

"It is my pleasure, and that is enough," said the king, haughtily.

"I said I was the real king of France," murmured Chicot.

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOW CHICOT PAID A VISIT TO BUSSY, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

THE next morning, about nine, Bussy was eating his breakfast, and talking with Remy over the events of the previous day.

"Remy," said he, "did you not think you had seen somewhere that gentleman whom they were dipping in a vat in the Rue Coquilliere?"

"Yes, M. le Comte, but I cannot think of his name."

"I ought to have helped him," said Bussy, "it is a duty one gentleman owes to another; but, really, Remy, I was too much occupied with my own affairs."

"But he must have recognized us, for we were our natural color, and it seemed to me that he rolled his eyes frightfully, and shook his fist at us."

"Are you sure of that, Remy? We must find out who it was; I cannot let such an insult pass."

"Oh!" cried Remy, "I know now who he was."

"How so?"

"I heard him swear."

"I should think so; any one would have sworn in such a situation."

"Yes, but he swore in German."

"Bah!"

"Yes, he said 'Gott Verdomme.'"

"Then it was Schomberg!"

"Himself, M. le Comte."

"Then, my dear Remy, get your valves ready."

"Why so, monsieur?"

"Because, before long, you will have to apply them either to his skin or to mine."

"You would not be so foolish as to get killed, now you are so well and so happy; St. Marie l'Egyptienne has cured you once, but she will get tired of working miracles for you."

"On the contrary, Remy, you cannot tell how pleasant it feels to risk your life when you are happy. I assure you I never fought with a good heart when I had lost large sums at play, when things had gone wrong, or when I had anything to reproach myself with; but when my purse is full, my heart light, and my conscience clear, I go boldly to the field, for I am sure of my hand; it is then I am brilliant. I should fight well to-day, Remy, for thanks to you," said he, extending his hand to the young man- "I am very happy."

"Stay a moment, however; you will, I hope, deprive yourself of this pleasure. A beautiful lady of my acquaintance made me swear to keep you safe and sound, under pretext that your life be, iongs to her."

"Good Remy!"

"You call me good Remy, because I brought you to see Madame de Monsoreau, but shall you call me so when you are separated from her? and unluckily the day approaches, if it be not come."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you not know that she is going to Anjou, and that I myself have the grief of being separated from Gertrude. Ah—"

Bussy could not help smiling at the pretended grief of the young man.

"You love her, then?" he said.

"I should think so; you should see how she beats me."

"And you let her do it?"

"Oh! yes."

"But to return to Diana, Remy: when shall we set off?"

"Ah! I expected that. On the latest possible day I should say."

"Why so?"

"Firstly, because it seems to me that M. le Duc d'Anjou will want you here."

"After?"

"Because M. de Monsoreau, by a special blessing, does not suspect you in the least, and would suspect something immediately if he saw you disappear from Paris at the same time as his wife."

"What do I care for that?"

"No; but I care. I charge myself with curing the sword strokes received in duels, for, as you manage your sword well, you never receive very serious ones; but not the blows given secretly by jealous husbands; they are animals, who, in such cases, strike hard."

"Well! my dear friend, if it is my destiny to be killed by M. de Monsoreau."

"Well!"

"Well! he will kill me."

"And then, a week after, Madame de Monsoreau will be reconciled to her husband, which will dreadfully enrage your poor soul, which will see it from above or below, without being able to prevent it."

"You are right, Remy; I will live."

"Quite right; but that is not all, you must be charmingly polite to him; he is frightfully jealous of the Duc d'Anjou, who, while you were ill in bed, promenaded before the house with his Aurilly. Make advances, then, to this charming husband, and do not even ask him what has become of his wife, since you know quite well."

"You are right, Remy, I believe. Now I am no longer jealous of the bear, I will be civil to him."

At this moment some one knocked at the door.

"Who is there?" cried Bussy.

"Monsieur," replied a page, "there is a gentleman below who wishes to speak to you."

"To speak to me so early; who is it."

"A tall gentleman, dressed in green velvet."

"Can it be Schomberg?"

"He said a tall man."

"True, then Monsoreau, perhaps; well, let him enter."

After a minute the visitor entered.

"M. Chicot!" cried Bussy.

"Himself, M. le Comte."

Remy retired into another room, and then Chicot said, "Monsieur, I come to propose to you a little bargain."

"Speak, monsieur," said Bussy, in great surprise.

"What will you promise me if I render you a great service?"

"That depends on the service, monsieur," replied Bussy, disdainfully.

Chicot feigned not to remark this air of disdain. "Monsieur," said he, sitting down and crossing his long legs, "I remark that you do not ask me to sit down."

The color mounted to Bussy's face.

"Monsieur," continued Chicot, "have you heard of the League?"

"I have heard much of it," said Bussy.

"Well, monsieur, you ought to know that it is an association of honest Christians, united for the purpose of religiously massacring their neighbors, the Huguenots. Are you of the League, monsieur? I am."

"But—monsieur—"

"Say only yes, or no."

"Allow me to express my astonishment—"

"I did myself the honor of asking you if you belonged to the League."

"M. Chicot, as I do not like questions whose import I do not understand, I beg you to change the conversation before I am forced to tell you that I do not like questioners. Come, M. Chicot, we have but a few minutes left."

"Well! in a few minutes one can say a great deal; however, I might have dispensed with asking you the question, as if you do not belong to the League now, you soon will, as M. d'Anjou does."

"M. d'Anjou! who told you that?"

"Himself, speaking to me in person, as the gentlemen of the law say, or rather write; for example, that dear M. Nicolas David, that star of the Forum Parisiense. Now you understand that as M. d'Anjou belongs to the League, you cannot help belonging to it also; you, who are his right arm. The League knows better than to accept a maimed chief."

"Well, M. Chicot, what then?"

"Why, if you do belong to it, or they think you are likely to do so, what has happened to his royal highness will certainly happen to you."

"And what has happened to him?"

"Monsieur," said Chicot, rising and imitating M. de Bussy's manner of a little before, "I do not love questions, nor questioners, therefore I have a great mind to let them do to you what they have done to-night to the duke."

"M. Chicot," said Bussy, with a smile, "speak, I beg of you; where is the duke?"

"He is in prison."

"Where?"

"In his own room. Four of my good friends guard him. M. de Schomberg, who was dyed blue yesterday, as you know, since you passed during the operation; M. d'Epernon, who is yellow from the fright he had; M. de Quelus, who is red with anger; and M. de Maugiron, who is white with ennui; it is beautiful to see; not to speak of the duke, who is going green with terror, so that we shall have a perfect rainbow to delight our eyes."

"Then, monsieur, you think my liberty in danger?"

"Danger! monsieur; suppose that they are already on the way to arrest you."

Bussy shuddered.

"Do you like the Bastille, M. de Bussy? it is a good place for meditation, and M. Laurent Testu, the governor, keeps a good cook."

"They would send me to the Bastille?"

"Ma foi! I ought to have in my pocket something like an order to conduct you there. Would you like to see it?" and Chicot drew from his pocket an order from the king in due form, to apprehend, wherever he might be, M. Louis de Clermont, seigneur de Bussy. "Written very nicely by M. Quelus," continued Chicot.

"Then, monsieur," cried Bussy, "you are really rendering me a service?"

"I think so; do you agree with me?"

"Monsieur, I beg you to tell me why you do it; for you love the king, and he hates me."

"M. le Comte, I save you; think what you please of my action. But do you forget that I asked for a recompense?"

"Ah, true."

"Well?"

"Most willingly, monsieur."

"Then some day you will do what I ask you?"

"On my honor, if possible."

"That is enough. Now mount your horse and disappear; I go to carry this order to those who are to use it."

"Then you were not to arrest me yourself?"

"I! for what do you take me?"

"But I should abandon my master."

"Have no scruples; he abandons you."

"You are a gentleman, M. Chicot."

Bussy called Remy. To do him justice, he was listening at the door.

"Remy, our horses!"

"They are saddled, monsieur."

"Ah!" said Chicot, "this young man knows what he is about."

Bussy thanked Chicot once more, and went down.

"Where are we going?" said Remy.

"Well—" said Bussy, hesitating.

"What do you say to Normandy?" said Chicot.

"It is too near."

"Flanders, then?"

"Too far."

"Anjou is a reasonable distance, monsieur," said Remy.

"Well, then, Anjou," said Bussy coloring.

"Adieu, monsieur!" said Chicot.

"It is destiny," said Remy, when he was gone.

"Let us be quick, and perhaps we may overtake her," said Bussy.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE CHESS OF M. CHICOT, AND THE CUP AND BALL OF M. QUELUS.

CHICOT returned joyfully to the Louvre. It was a great satisfaction to him to have saved a brave gentleman like Bussy.

M. de Guise, after having received in the morning the principal Leaguers, who came to bring him the registers filled with signatures, and after having made them all swear to recognize the chief that the king should appoint, went out to visit M. d'Anjou, whom he had lost sight of about ten the evening before. The duke found the prince's valet rather unquiet at his master's absence, but he imagined that he had slept at the Louvre.

The Duc de Guise asked to speak to Aurilly, who was most likely to know where his master was. Aurilly came, but stated he had been separated from the prince the evening before by a pressure of the crowd, and had come to the Hotel d'Anjou to wait for him, not knowing that his highness had intended to sleep at the Louvre. He added that he had just sent to the Louvre to inquire, and that a message had been returned that the duke was still asleep.

"Asleep at eleven o'clock! not likely. You ought to go to the Louvre, Aurilly."

"I did think of it, monseigneur, but I feared that this was only a tale invented to satisfy my messenger, and that the prince was seeking pleasure elsewhere, and might be annoyed at my seeking him."

"Oh, no; the duke has too much sense to be pleasure-seeking on a day like this. Go to the Louvre; you will be sure to find him there."

"I will if you wish it; but what shall I say to him?"

"Say that the convocation at the Louvre is fixed for two o'clock, and that it is necessary that we should have a conference first. It is not at the time when

the king is about to choose a chief for the League that he should be sleeping."

"Very well, monseigneur, I will beg his highness to come here."

"And say that I am waiting impatiently for him. Meanwhile I will go and seek M. de Bussy."

"But if I do not find his highness, what am I to do?"

"Then make no further search for him. In any event I shall be at the Louvre at a quarter before two."

Aurilly passed through the courtiers who crowded the Louvre, and made his way to the duke's apartments. At the door he found Chicot playing chess. Aurilly tried to pass, but Chicot, with his long legs blocked up the doorway. He was forced to touch him on the shoulder.

"Ah, it is you, M. Aurilly."

"What are you doing, M. Chicot?"

"Playing chess, as you see."

"All alone?"

"Yes, I am studying; do you play?"

"Very little."

"Yes, I know you are a musician, and music is so difficult an art, that those who give themselves to it must sacrifice all their time."——"You seem very serious over your game."

"Yes, it is my king who disquiets me; you must know, M. Aurilly, that at chess the king is a very insignificant person, who has no will, who can only go one step forward or back, or one to the right or left, while he is surrounded by active enemies, by knights who jump three squares at a time, by a crowd of pawns who surround him, so that if he be badly counseled he is a ruined king in no time, ma foi."

"But, M. Chicot, how does it happen that you are studying this at the door of his royal highness's room?"

"Because I am waiting for M. Quelus, who is in there."

"Where?"——"With his highness."

"With his highness! What is he doing there? I did not think they were such friends."

"Hush!" then he whispered in Aurilly's ear, "he is come to ask pardon of the duke for a little quarrel they had yesterday."——"Really!"

"It was the king who insisted on it; you know on what excellent terms the brothers are just now. The king would not suffer an impertinence of Quelus's to pass, and ordered him to apologize."

"Really!"

"Ah! M. Aurilly, I think that we are entering the golden age; the Louvre is about to become Arcadia, and the two brothers Arcades ambo."

Aurilly smiled, and passed into the antechamber, where he was courteously saluted by Quelus, between whose hands a superb cup and ball of ebony inlaid with ivory was making rapid evolutions.

"Bravo! M. Quelus," said Aurilly.

"Ah! my dear M. Aurilly, when shall I play cup and ball as well as you play the lute?"

"When you have studied your plaything as long as I have my instrument. But where is monseigneur? I thought you were with him."

"I have an audience with him, but Schomberg comes first."

"What! M. de Schomberg, also!"

"Oh! mon Dieu; yes. The king settled all that. He is in the next room. Enter, M. Aurilly, and remind the prince that we are waiting for him."

Aurilly opened the second door and saw Schomberg reclining on a kind of couch, from which he amused himself by sending from a tube little balls of earth through a gold ring, suspended from the ceiling by a silk thread, while a favorite dog brought him back the balls as they fell.

"Ah! guten morgen, M. Aurilly, you see I am amusing myself while I wait for my audience."

"But where is monseigneur?"

"Oh! he is occupied in pardoning D'Epernon and Maugiron. But will you not enter, you who are privileged?"

"Perhaps it would be indiscreet."

"Not at all; enter, M. Aurilly, enter." And he pushed him into the next room, where the astonished musician perceived D'Epernon before a mirror, occupied in stiffening his mustachios, while Maugiron, seated near the window, was cutting out engravings, by the side of which the bass-

reliefs on the temple of Venus Aphrodite would have looked holy.

The duke, without his sword, was in his armchair between these two men, who only looked at him to watch his movements, and only spoke to him to say something disagreeable: seeing Aurilly, he got up to meet him.

"Take care, monseigneur," said Maugiron, "you are stepping on my figures."

"Mon Dieu!" cried the musician, "he insults my master!"

"Dear M. Aurilly," said D'Epernon, still arranging his mustachios, "how are you?"

"Be so kind as to bring me here your little dagger," said Maugiron.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, do you not remember where you are?"

"Yes, yes, my dear Orpheus, that is why I ask for your dagger; you see M. le Duc has none."

"Aurilly!" cried the duke, in a tone full of grief and rage, "do you not see that I am a prisoner?"

"A prisoner! to whom?"

"To my brother; you might know that by my jailers."

"Oh! if I had but guessed it."

"You would have brought your lute to amuse his highness," said a mocking voice behind them, "but I thought of it, and sent for it; here it is."

"How does your chess go on, Chicot?" said D'Epernon.

"I believe I shall save the king, but it is not without trouble. Come, M. Aurilly, give me your poniard in return for the lute; a fair exchange."

The astonished musician obeyed.

"There is one rat in the trap," said Quelus, who returned to his post in the antechamber, only exchanging his cup and ball for Schomberg's shooting tube.

"It is amusing to vary one's pleasures," said Chicot; "so for a change I will go and sign the League."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE RECEPTION OF THE CHIEFS OF THE LEAGUE.

THE time for the great reception drew near. Paris, nearly as tumultuous as the evening before, had sent toward the Louvre its deputation of Leaguers, its bodies of workmen, its sheriffs, its militia, and its constantly-increasing masses of spectators.

The king, on his throne in the great hall, was surrounded by his officers, his friends, his courtiers, and his family, waiting for all the corporations to defile before him, when M. de Monsoreau entered abruptly.

"Look, Henriquet," said Chicot, who was standing near the king.

"At what?"

"At your chief huntsman; pardieu, he is well worth it. See how pale and dirty he is!"

Henri made a sign to M. de Monsoreau, who approached.

"How is it that you are at the Louvre, monsieur? I thought you at Vincennes."

"Sire, the stag was turned off at seven o'clock this morning, but when noon came, and I had no news, I feared that some misfortune had happened to your majesty, and I returned."

"Really!"

"Sire, if I have done wrong, attribute it to an excess of devotion."

"Yes, monsieur, and I appreciate it."

"Now," said the count, hesitatingly, "if your majesty wishes me to return to Vincennes, as I am reassured—"

"No, no, stay; this chase was a fancy which came into our head, and which went as it came; do not go away, I want near me devoted subjects, and you have just classed yourself as such."

Monsoreau bowed, and said, "Where does your majesty wish me to remain?"

"Will you give him to me for half an hour?" said Chicot to the king, in a low voice.

"What for?"

"To torment him a little. You owe me some compensation for obliging me to be present at this tiresome ceremony."

"Well, take him."

"Where does your majesty wish me to stand?" again asked M. de Monsoreau.

"Where you like; go behind my armchair, that is where I put my friends."

"Come here," said Chicot, making

"WELL, HENRI, YOU CAN READ, READ THIS."—*Page 371.*

room for M. de Monsoreau, "come and get the scent of these fellows. Here is game which can be tracked without a hound. Here are the shoemakers who pass, or rather who have passed; then here are the tanners. Mort de ma vie! if you lose their scent, I will take away your place."

M. de Monsoreau listened mechanically; he seemed preoccupied, and looked round him anxiously.

"Do you know what your chief huntsman is hunting for now?" said Chicot, in an undertone, to the king.

"No."

"Your brother."

"The game is not in sight."

"Just ask him where his countess is."

"What for?"

"Just ask."

"M. le Comte," said Henri, "what have you done with Madame de Monsoreau? I do not see her here."

The count started, but replied, "Sire, she is ill, the air of Paris did not agree with her; so having obtained leave from the queen, she set out last night, with her father, for Meridor."

"Paris is not good for women in her situation," said Chicot.

Monsoreau grew pale and looked furiously at him.

"This poor countess!" continued Chicot, "she will die of ennui by the way."

"I said that she traveled with her father."

"A father is very respectable, I allow, but not very amusing; and if she had only that worthy baron to amuse her it would be sad; but luckily—"

"What!" cried the count.

"What?"

"What do you mean by 'luckily'?"

"Ah, it was an ellipsis I used."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, but it was. Ask Henri, who is a man of letters."

"Yes," said the king; "but what did your adverb mean?"

"What adverb?"

"'Luckily.'"

"'Luckily' means luckily. Luckily, then, there exist some of our friends, and very amusing ones, who, if they meet the countess, will amuse her, and as they are going the same way, it is probable they will. Oh, I see them from here; do you not, Henri; you, who are a man of imagination? There they go, on a good road, well mounted, and saying sweet things to Madame la Comtesse, which she likes very much, dear lady."

M. de Monsoreau was furious, but he could not show it before the king; so he said as mildly as he could, "What, have you friends traveling to Anjou?"

"Good; pretend to be mysterious."

"I swear to you—"

"Oh! you know they are there, although I saw you just now seeking for them mechanically among the crowd."

"You saw me?"

"Yes, you, the palest of all chief huntsmen, past, present, and future, from Nimrod to M. d'Aulefort, your predecessor."

"M. Chicot!"

"The palest, I repeat."

"Monsieur, will you return to the friends of whom you spoke, and be so good as to name them, if your superabundant imagination will let you."

"Seek, monsieur. Morbleu, it is your occupation to hunt out animals, witness the unlucky stag whom you deranged this morning, and who thought it very unkind of you. Seek."

The eyes of M. de Monsoreau wandered anxiously again.

"What!" cried he, seeing a vacant place by the king, "not the Duc d'Anjou?"

"Taïnt! Taïnt! the beast is found."

"He is gone to-day?"

"He is gone to-day, but it is possible that he set out last night. When did your brother disappear, Henri?"

"Last night."

"The duke gone!" murmured Monsoreau, paler than ever.

"I do not say he is gone, I say only that he disappeared last night, and that his best friends do not know where he is," said the king.

"Oh!" cried the count, "if I thought so—"

"Well; what should you do? Besides,

what harm if he does talk nonsense to Madame de Monsoreau? He is the gallant of the family, you know."

"I am lost!" murmured the count, trying to go away. But Chicot detained him.

"Keep still; mordieu! you shake the king's chair. Mort de ma vie, your wife will be quite happy with the prince to talk to, and M. Aurilly to play the lute to her."

Monsoreau trembled with anger.

"Quietly, monsieur," continued Chicot; "hide your joy, here is the business beginning; you should not show your feelings so openly; listen to the discourse of the king."

M. de Monsoreau was forced to keep quiet. M. de Guise entered and knelt before the king, not without throwing an uneasy glance of surprise on the vacant seat of M. d'Anjou. The king rose, and the hearlds commanded silence.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW THE KING NAMED A CHIEF WHO WAS NEITHER THE DUC DE GUISE NOR M. D'ANJOU.

"GENTLEMEN," said the king, after assuring himself that his four friends, now replaced by ten Swiss, were behind him, "a king hears equally the voices which come to him from above and from below, that is to say, what is commanded by God, or asked by his people. I understand perfectly that there is a guarantee for my people, in the association of all classes which has been formed to defend the Catholic faith, and therefore I approve of the counsels of my cousin De Guise. I declare, then, the Holy League duly constituted, and as so great a body must have a powerful head, and as it is necessary that the chief called to sustain the Church should be one of its most zealous sons, I chose a Christian prince for the chief, and declare that this chief shall be"—he made a slight pause—"Henri de Valois, king of France and Poland."

The Duc de Guise was thunderstruck. Large drops stood on his forehead, and he looked from one to the other of his brothers. All the Leaguers uttered a murmur of surprise and discontent. The cardinal stole up to his brother, and whispered:

"Francois, I fear we are no longer in safety here. Let us haste to take leave, for the populace is uncertain, and the king, whom they execrated yesterday, will be their idol for two or three days."

During this time the king had signed the act prepared beforehand by M. de Morvilliers, the only person, with the exception of the queen mother, who was in the secret, then he passed the pen to the Duc de Guise, saying:

"Sign, my cousin; there, below me, now pass it to M. le Cardinal and M. de Mayenne."

But these two had already disappeared. The king remarked their absence, and added, "Then pass the pen to M. de Monsereau."

The duke did so, and was about to retire, but the king said, "Wait."

And while the others signed, he added, "My cousin, it was your advice, I believe, to guard Paris with a good army, composed of all the forces of the League. The army is made, and the natural general of the Parisians is the king."

"Assuredly, sire."

"But I do not forget that there is another army to command, and that this belongs of right to the bravest soldier in my kingdom; therefore go and command the army."

"And when am I to set out, sire?"

"Immediately."

"Henri, Henri!" whispered Chicot; but, in spite of his signs and grimaces, the king gave the duke his brevet ready signed. He took it and retired, and was soon out of Paris. The rest of the assembly dispersed gradually, crying, "Vive le Roi! and Vive la Ligue!"

"Oh, sire!" cried the favorites, approaching the king, "what a sublime idea you have had!"

"They think that gold is going to rain on them like manna," said Chicot, who followed his master about everywhere with lamentations. As soon as they were left alone, "Ah! M. Chicot!" said Henri, "you are never content. Diable! I do

not ask even for complaisance, but for good sense."

"You are right, Henri; it is what you want most."

"Confess I have done well."

"That is just what I do not think."

"Ah! you are jealous, M. Roi de France."

"I! Heaven forbid. I shall choose better subjects for jealousy."

"Corbleu."

"Oh! what self-love."

"Am I or not king of the League?"

"Certainly you are; but—"

"But what?"

"You are no longer king of France."

"And who is king then?"

"Everybody, except you; firstly, your brother—"

"My brother!"

"Yes, M. d'Anjou."

"Whom I hold prisoner."

"Yes, but prisoner as he is, he was consecrated."

"By whom was he consecrated?"

"By the Cardinal de Guise. Really, Henri, you have a fine police. They consecrate a king at Paris before thirty-three people, in the church of St. Genevieve, and you do not know of it!"

"Oh! and you do?"

"Certainly I do."

"How can you know what I do not?"

"Ah! because M. de Morvilliers manages your police, and I am my own."

The king frowned.

"Well, then, without counting Henri de Valois, we have Francois d'Anjou for king," continued Chicot; "and then there is the Duc de Guise."

"The Duc de Guise!"

"Yes, Henri de Guise, Henri le Balfre."

"A fine king! whom I exile, whom I send to the army."

"Good! as if you were not exiled to Poland; and La Charite is nearer to the Louvre than Cracow is. Ah, yes, you send him to the army—that is so clever; that is to say, you put thirty thousand men under his orders, ventre de biche! and a real army, not like your army of the League; no, no, an army of bourgeois is good for Henri de Valois, but Henri de Guise must have an army of soldiers—and what soldiers? hardened warriors, capable of destroying twenty armies of the League; so that if, being king in fact, Henri de Guise had the folly one day to wish to be so in name, he would only have to turn toward the capital, and say, 'Let us swallow Paris, and Henri de Valois and the Louvre at a mouthful,' and the rogues would do it. I know them."

"You forget one thing in your argument, illustrious politician."

"Ah, diable! it is possible! If you mean a fourth king—"

"No; you forget that before thinking of reigning in France, when a Valois is on the throne, it would be necessary to look back and count your ancestors. That such an idea might come to M. d'Anjou is possible; his ancestors are mine, and it is only a question of primogeniture. But M. de Guise!"

"Ah! that is just where you are in error."

"How so?"

"M. de Guise is of a better race than you think."

"Better than me, perhaps," said Henri, smiling.

"There is no perhaps in it."

"You are mad. Learn to read, my friend."

"Well, Henri, you who can read, read this;" and he drew from his pocket the genealogy which we know already, handing it to Henri, who turned pale as he recognized, near to the signature of the prelate, the seal of St. Peter.

"What do you say, Henri? Are not your fleur-de-lis thrown a little in the background?"

"But how did you get this genealogy?"

"I! Do I seek these things? It came to seek me."

"Where?"

"Under the bolster of a lawyer."

"And what was his name?"

"M. Nicolas David."

"Where was he?"

"At Lyons."

"And who took it from under the bolster?"

"One of my good friends."

"Who is he?"

"A monk."

"His name?"

"Gorenflot."

"What! the abominable Leaguer who uttered those incendiary discourses at St. Genevieve, and again yesterday in the streets of Paris?"

"You remember the history of Brutus, who pretended to be a fool?"

"He is, then, a profound politician? Did he take it from the advocate?"

"Yes, by force."

"Then he is brave?"

"Brave as Bayard."

"And having done this, he has not asked for any recompense?"

"He returned humbly to his convent, and only asks me to forget that he ever came out."

"Then he is modest?"

"As St. Crepin."

"Chicot, your friend shall be made a prior on the first vacancy."

"Thanks for him, Henri."

"Ma foi!" said Chicot to himself, "if he escapes being hung by Mayenne, he will have an abbey."

CHAPTER L.

ETEOCLES AND POLYNICES.

THIS day of the League terminated brilliantly and tumultuously, as it began. The friends of the king rejoiced, the preachers proposed to canonize Brother Henri, and spoke everywhere of the great deeds of the Valois. The favorites said, "The lion is roused." The Leaguers said, "The fox has discovered the snare."

The three Lorraine princes, as we have seen, had left Paris, and their principal agent, M. de Monsoreau, was ready to start for Anjou. But as he was leaving the Louvre, Chicot stopped him.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" said he.

"To his highness."

"His highness?"

"Yes, I am unquiet about him. We do not live in times when a prince ought to travel without a good escort."

"Well, if you are unquiet, so am I."

"About what?"

"About his highness also."

"Why?"

"Do you not know what they say?"

"That he has gone to Anjou."

"No; that he is dead."

"Bah!" said Monsoreau, with a tone of surprise, not unmixed with joy, "you told me he was traveling."

"Diable! they persuaded me so, but now I have good reason to think that if the poor prince be traveling, it is to another world."

"What gives you these mournful ideas?"

"He entered the Louvre yesterday, did he not?"

"Certainly; I came in with him."

"Well! he has never been seen to come out."

"From the Louvre!"

"No."

"Where is Aurilly?"

"Disappeared."

"But his people?"

"Disappeared."

"You are joking, are you not, M. Chicot?"

"Ask!"

"Whom?"

"The king."

"I cannot question his majesty."

"Oh! yes, if you go about it in the right way."

"Well," said the count. "I cannot remain in this uncertainty." And leaving Chicot, he went to the king's apartment.

"Where is the king?" he asked. "I have to render an account to him of the execution of some orders he gave me."

"With M. le Duc d'Anjou," replied the man.

"With the duke; then he is not dead?"

"I am not so sure of that."

M. de Monsoreau was thoroughly bewildered; for if M. d'Anjou were in the Louvre, his absence on such a day was unaccountable.

Immediately after the sitting, Quelus, Maugiron, Schomberg, and D'Epernon, in spite of the ennui they experienced there, were so anxious to be disagreeable to the duke that they returned to him.

He, on his part, was mortally ennuyé, as well as anxious, which, it must be confessed, the conversation of these gentlemen was not calculated to remove.

"Do you know, Quelus," said Maugiron, "that it is only now I begin to appreciate our friend Valois; really he is a great politician."

"Explain yourself," said Quelus, who was lounging on a chair.

"While he was afraid of the conspiracy, he kept it quiet; now he speaks of it openly, therefore he is no longer afraid of it."

"Well?"

"If he no longer fears it, he will punish it; you know Valois, he has certainly many good qualities, but clemency is not one of them."

"Granted."

"Then if he punishes these conspirators there will be a trial, and we shall have a fine spectacle."

"Unless, which is possible, on account of the rank of the accused, they arrange it all quietly."

"That would be my advice, certainly; it is better in family affairs."

Aurilly glanced at the prince.

"Ma foi," said Maugiron, "I know one thing; that in the king's place I would not spare the high heads, which are always the most guilty. I would make an example of one or two—one, at all events."

"I think it would be well to revive the famous invention of sacks."

"What was that?"

"A royal fancy in the year 1550; they shut up a man in a sack, in company with three or four cats, and threw them into the water. The minute the cats felt the water they attacked the man, and there passed in the sack things which unluckily could never be seen."

"Really, Quelus, you are a well of science, and your conversation is most interesting."

"They could not apply this invention to the chiefs; they have the right to be beheaded; but to the small fry, I mean the favorites, squires, and lute-players."

"Gentlemen—" stammered Aurilly.

"Do not reply to them, Aurilly," said Francois, "it cannot be addressed to me." As he spoke the king appeared on the threshold. The duke rose. "Sire," cried he, "I appeal against the unworthy treatment I meet with from your followers."

Henri did not seem to hear. "Good-morning, Quelus," said he, kissing his favorite on both cheeks; "good-morning, the sight of you rejoices my soul, and you, my poor Maugiron, how are you?"

"I am terribly ennuyé, sire; when I undertook to guard your brother, I thought he was more amusing. Oh! the tiresome prince; are you sure he is the son of your father and mother?"

"Sire! you hear," cried the prince, "is it your wish that your brother should be insulted?"

"Silence, monsieur," said Henri, "I do not like my prisoners to complain."

"Prisoner, or not, I am your—"

"The title which you are about to invoke," interrupted the king, "is fatal to you. My brother guilty, is doubly guilty."

"But if he is not?"

"He is."

"Of what crime?"

"Of having displeased me."

"Sire, have our family quarrels need of witnesses?"

"You are right, monsieur. My friends, let me speak a little to my brother."

"I will take Aurilly," said Maugiron.

"Now we are alone, monsieur," said the king, when they were gone.

"I waited for this moment impatiently."

"And I also; ah, you want my crown, my worthy Eteocles; you made of the League a means, and of the throne an aim, and were consecrated in a corner of Paris, to be able to proclaim yourself to the Parisians shining with holy oil."

"Alas! your majesty will not let me speak."

"What for?—to lie, or to tell me things which I know already? But no, you would lie; for to confess what you have done would be to confess that you merit death. You would lie, and I would spare you that shame."

"My brother, is it your intention to overwhelm me with outrages?"

"If what I say is an outrage, it is I

who lie, and I ask no better. Speak then, I listen; tell me you are not disloyal, and at the same time unskillful."

"I do not know what your majesty means; you speak in enigmas."

"Then I will explain my words; you have conspired against me, as formerly you conspired against my brother Charles, only then it was by the aid of Henri of Navarre, and now it is with the assistance of the Duc de Guise. It is true that formerly you crawled like a serpent; now you wish to spring like the lion; after perfidy, open force; after poison, the sword."

"Poison! what do you mean?" cried Francois, with flashing eyes.

"The poison with which you assassinated our brother Charles, which you destined for Henri of Navarre, your associate. That fatal poison is known; our mother has used it so often, which is doubtless the reason why you renounced it on this occasion, and preferred rather the part of captain of the League. But look me in the face, Francois, and learn that a man like you shall never kill me. A sword! Ah! I should like to see you here in this room alone with me, holding a sword. I have conquered you in cunning, and in a combat you would be killed. Dream no longer of struggling against me in any manner, for from this moment I act as king—as master—as despot; I shall watch you everywhere, follow you everywhere, and, at the least suspicion, I will throw you to the ax of my executioner. This is what I had to say to you in private, and I will order you to be left alone to-night to ponder over my words."

"Then, sire, for a suspicion, I have fallen into disgrace with you?"

"Say, under my justice."

"But, at least, sire, fix a term to my captivity, that I may know what to expect?"

"You will know when you hear your sentence read."

"Can I not see my mother?"

"What for? There were but three copies in the world of the famous hunting-book which killed my poor brother, and of the two others, one is in London and the other at Florence. Besides, I am not a Nimrod, like my poor brother; adieu, Francois."

"Gentlemen," said the king, opening the door, "the Duc d'Anjou has requested to be alone to-night to reflect on an answer he has to make to me to-morrow morning. Leave him then alone, except occasional visits of precaution. If he be troublesome, call me; I have the Bastille ready, and the governor, M. Laurent Testu, is the best man in the world to conquer ill-tempers."

"Sire," cried Francois, trying a last effort, "remember I am your—"

"You were also the brother of Charles IX., I think."

"At least restore me to my friends."

"I deprive myself of mine to give them to you." And Henri shut the door, while the duke fell in despair into his armchair.

CHAPTER LI.

HOW PEOPLE DO NOT ALWAYS LOSE THEIR TIME BY SEARCHING EMPTY DRAWERS.

THE scene which the duke had just had with the king made him regard his position as desperate. The minions had not allowed him to be ignorant of what had passed, and he had heard the people cry, "Vive le roi!" He felt himself abandoned by the other chiefs, who had themselves to save. In his quarrels with his brother Charles he had always had for confidants, or rather dupes, those two devoted men, Coconnas and La Mole, and, for the first time in his life, feeling himself alone and isolated, he felt a kind of remorse at having sacrificed them. During that time his sister Marguerite loved and consoled him. How had he recompensed her?

He had recently had near him a brave and valiant heart and sword—Bussy, the brave Bussy. And he had offended him to please Monsoreau, who had his secret, with which he always threatened him, and which was now known to the king. He had therefore quarreled with Bussy gratuitously, and, above all, uselessly, which as a great politician once said, "was more than a crime, it was a mistake!" How he would have rejoiced in his present situation, to know that Bussy

was watching over him; Bussy the loyal, Bussy the universal favorite. It would have been probable liberty and certain vengeance.

But as we have said, Bussy, wounded to the heart, kept away from the prince, so the prisoner remained fifty feet above the ground, with the four favorites in the corridor, without counting the court full of Swiss. Besides this, one or other of the young men entered from time to time, and, without seeming even to notice the prince, went round the room, examined the doors and windows, looked under the beds and tables, and glanced at the curtains and sheets.

"Ma foi!" said Maugiron, after one of these visits, "I have done; I am not going to look after him any more to-night."

"Yes," said D'Epernon, "as long as we guard him, there is no need of going to look at him."

"And he is not handsome to look at," said Quelus.

"Still," said Schomberg, "I think we had better not relax our vigilance, for the devil is cunning."

"Yes, but not cunning enough to pass over the bodies of four men like us."

"That is true," said Quelus.

"Oh!" said Schomberg, "do you think, if he wants to fly, he will choose our corridor to come through? He would make a hole in the wall."——"With what?"

"Then he has the windows."

"Ah! the windows, bravo, Schomberg; would you jump forty-five feet?"

"I confess that forty-five feet—"

"Yes, and he who is lame, and heavy, and timid as—"

"You," said Schomberg.

"You know I fear nothing but phantoms—that is an affair of the nerves."

"The last phantom was," said Quelus, "that all those whom he had killed in duels appeared to him one night."

"However," said Maugiron, "I have read of wonderful escapes; with sheets, for instance."

"Ah! that is more sensible. I saw myself, at Bordeaux, a prisoner who escaped by the aid of his sheets."

"You see, then?"

"Yes, but he had his leg broken, and his neck, too; his sheets were thirty feet too short, and he had to jump, so that while his body escaped from prison, his soul escaped from his body."

"Besides," said Quelus, "if he escapes, we will follow him, and in catching him some mischief might happen to him."

So they dismissed the subject. They were perfectly right that the duke was not likely to attempt a perilous escape. From time to time his pale face was at the window which overlooked the fosses of the Louvre, beyond which was an open space about fifteen feet broad, and then the Seine rolled calm as a mirror. On the other side rose, like a giant, the tower of Nesle.

He had watched the sunset and the gradual extinction of all the lights. He had contemplated the beautiful spectacle of old Paris, with its roofs gilded by the last rays of the sun, and silvered by the first beams of the moon; then little by little he was seized with a great terror at seeing immense clouds roll over the sky and announce a storm. Among his other weaknesses, the Duc d'Anjou was afraid of thunder, and he would have given anything to have had his guardians with him again, even if they insulted him. He threw himself on his bed, but found it impossible to sleep. Then he began to swear, and break everything near him. It was a family failing, and they were accustomed to it at the Louvre. The young men had opened the door to see what the noise meant, and seeing that it was the duke amusing himself, they had shut it again, which redoubled his anger. He had just broken a chair, when a crashing of glass was heard at the window, and he felt a sharp blow on his thigh. His first idea was that he was wounded by some emissary of the king's.

"Ah! I am dead!" he cried, and fell on the carpet. But as he fell his hand came in contact with a larger and rougher substance than a ball.

"Oh! a stone," thought he, and feeling his leg, he found it uninjured. He picked up the stone and looked at it, and saw

that it was wrapped in a piece of paper. Then the duke's ideas began to change. Might not this stone come from a friend as well as an enemy. He approached the light, cut the silk which tied the paper round the stone and read—

"Are you tired of keeping your room? Do you love open air and liberty? Enter the little room where the queen of Navarre hid your poor friend, M. de la Mole, open the cupboard, and. by displacing the lowest bracket, you will find a double bottom; in this there is a silk ladder; attach it yourself to the balcony, two vigorous arms will hold it at the bottom. A horse, swift as thought, will lead you to a safe place.

"A FRIEND."

"A friend!" cried the prince; "oh! I did not know I had a friend. Who is this friend who thinks of me?" And the duke ran to the window, but could see no one.

"Can it be a snare?" thought he; "but first let me see if there is a double bottom and a ladder."

The duke then, leaving the light where it was for precaution, groped his way to the cabinet, which he knew so well. He opened it, felt for the bottom shelf, and, to his great joy, found what he looked for. As a thief escapes with his booty, the duke rushed into the next room with his prey. Ten o'clock struck; the duke thought of his hourly visitors, and hid his ladder under a cushion, on which he sat down. Indeed, five minutes had not passed before Maugiron appeared in a dressing-gown, with a sword in one hand, and a light in the other. As he came in one of his friends said to him, "The bear is furious, he was breaking everything just now; take care he does not devour you, Maugiron."

Maugiron made his usual examination; he saw a broken window, but thought the duke had done it in his rage.

"Maugiron!" cried Schomberg, from outside, "are you already eaten that you do not speak? In that case, sigh, at least, that we may know and avenge you."

The duke trembled with impatience.

"No, no," said Maugiron; "on the contrary, my bear is quite conquered."

And so saying he went out and locked the door. When the key had ceased to turn in the lock the duke murmured—

"Take care, gentlemen, or the duke will be too much for you."

CHAPTER LII.

VENTRE ST. GRIS.

LEFT alone, the duke, knowing he had at least an hour before him, drew out his ladder, and carefully examined the fastenings.

"The ladder is good," said he, at length, "and will not break."

Then he unrolled it all, and counted thirty-eight rounds of fifteen inches each.

"The length is sufficient," said he. "there is nothing to fear on that point. Ah! but if it were some of those cursed minions who sent me to the ladder? If I attach it to the balcony they will let me do it, and while I am descending they will cut the cords. But no; they could not be foolish enough to think I would fly without barricading the door, and I should have time to fly before they could force it. But what person in the world, except my sister herself, could know of a ladder hidden in her dressing-room? What friend of mine can it be?"

Suddenly an idea struck him, and he cried, "Bussy!"

Indeed, Bussy, whom so many ladies adored, Bussy was a hero to the queen of Navarre, and his only true friend—was it Bussy? Everything made him think so. The duke, of course, did not know all his motives for being angry with him, for he did not know his love for Diana, and believed him to be too noble to think of resentment when his master was a prisoner. He approached the window again and fancied he could see in the fog the indistinct forms of three horses and two men by the river. Two men. These must be Bussy and Remy. He then looked through the keyhole, and saw his four guardians; two were asleep, and two had inherited Chicot's chess-board and were playing. He extinguished his light.

Then he opened his window, and looked

over the balcony; the gulf below him looked dreadful in the darkness, and he drew back. But air and liberty have an attraction so irresistible to a prisoner, that Francois, on withdrawing from the window, felt as if he were being stifled, and for an instant something like disgust of life and indifference to death passed through his mind. He fancied he was growing courageous, and, profiting by this moment of excitement, he seized the ladder, fixed it to the balcony, then barricaded the door as well as he could, and returned to the window. The darkness was now great, and the first growlings of the storm began to make themselves heard; a great cloud with silver fringes extended itself like a recumbent elephant from one side to the other of the river. A flash of lightning broke the immense cloud for a moment, and the prince fancied that he saw below him in the fosse the same figures he had imagined before. A horse neighed; there was no more doubt—he was waited for.

He shook the ladder to see if it was firm, then he put his leg over the balustrade and placed his foot on the first step. Nothing can describe the anguish of the prisoner at this moment, placed between a frail silk cord on the one hand and his brother's cruel menaces on the other. But as he stood there he felt the ladder stiffened; some one held it. Was it a friend or an enemy? Were they open arms, or armed ones which waited for him? An irresistible terror seized him; he still held the balcony with his left hand, and made a movement to remount, when a very slight pull at the ladder came to him like a solicitation. He took courage, and tried the second step. The ladder was held as firm as a rock, and he found a steady support for his foot. He descended rapidly, almost gliding down, when all at once, instead of touching the earth, which he knew to be near, he felt himself seized in the arms of a man who whispered, "You are saved." Then he was carried along the fosse till they came to the end, when another man seized him by the collar and drew him up, and after having aided his companion in the same way, they ran to the river, where stood the horses. The prince knew he was at the mercy of his saviors, so he jumped at once on a horse, and his companions did the same. The same voice now said, "Quick!" And they set off at a gallop.

"All goes well at present," thought the prince, "let us hope it will end so. Thanks, my brave Bussy," said he to his companion on the right, who was entirely covered with a large cloak.

"Quick!" replied the other.

They arrived thus at the great ditch of the Bastille, which they crossed on a bridge improvised by the Leaguers the night before. The three cavaliers rode toward Charenton, when all at once the man on the right entered the forest of Vincennes, saying only, "Come." The prince's horse neighed, and several others answered from the depths of the forest. Francois would have stopped if he could, for he feared they were taking him to an ambush, but it was too late, and in a few minutes he found himself in a small open space, where eight or ten men on horseback were drawn up.

"Oh! oh!" said the prince, "what does this mean, monsieur?"

"Ventre St. Gris! it means that we are saved."

"You! Henri!" cried the duke, stupefied, "you! my liberator?"

"Does that astonish you? Are we not related, Agrippa?" continued he, looking round for his companion.

"Here I am," said D'Aubigne.

"Are there two fresh horses, with which we can go a dozen leagues without stopping?"

"But where are you taking me, my cousin?"

"Where you like, only be quick, for the king of France has more horses than I have, and is rich enough to kill a dozen if he wishes to catch us."

"Really, then, I am free to go where I like?"

"Certainly, I wait your orders."

"Well, then, to Angers."

"To Angers; so be it, there you are at home."

"But you?"

"I! when we are in sight of Angers I shall leave you, and ride on to Navarre, where my good Margot expects me, and must be much ennuyée at my absence."

"But no one knew you were here?"

"I came to sell three diamonds of my wife's."

"Ah! very well."

"And also to know if this League was really going to ruin me."

"You see there is nothing in it."

"Thanks to you, no."

"How! thanks to me?"

"Certainly. If, instead of refusing to be chief of the League, when you knew it was directed against me, you had accepted, I was ruined. Therefore, when I heard that the king had punished your refusal with imprisonment, I swore to release you, and I have done so."

"Always so simple-minded," thought Francois, "really, it is easy to deceive him."

"Now for Anjou," thought the king. "Ah! M. de Guise, I send you a companion you do not want."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FRIENDS.

WHILE Paris was in this ferment, Madame de Monsoreau, escorted by her father and two servants, pursued their way to Meridor. She began to enjoy her liberty, precious to those who have suffered. The azure of the sky, compared to that which hung always menacingly over the black towers of the Bastille, the trees already green, all appeared to her fresh and young, beautiful and new, as if she had really come out of the tomb where her father had believed her. He, the old baron, had grown young again. We will not attempt to describe their long journey, free from incidents. Several times the baron said to Diana—

"Do not fear, my daughter."

"Fear what?"

"Were you not looking if M. de Monsoreau was following us?"

"Yes, it was true. I did look," replied she, with a sigh and another glance behind.

At last, on the eighth day, they reached the chateau of Meridor, and were received by Madame de St. Luc and her husband. Then began for these four people one of those existences of which every man has dreamed in reading Virgil or Theocritus. The baron and St. Luc hunted from morning till evening; you might have seen troops of dogs rushing from the hills in pursuit of some hare or fox, and startling Diana and Jeanne, as they sat side by side on the moss, under the shade of the trees.

"Recount to me," said Jeanne, "all that happened to you in the tomb, for you were dead to us. See, the hawthorn is shedding on us its last flowers, and the elders send out their perfume. Not a breath in the air, not a human being near us; recount, little sister."

"What can I say?"

"Tell me, are you happy? That beautiful eye often swimming in tears, the paleness of your cheeks, that mouth which tries a smile which it never finishes—Diana, you must have many things to tell me."

"No, nothing."

"You are, then, happy with M. de Monsoreau?"

Diana shuddered.

"You see!" said Jeanne.

"With M. de Monsoreau! Why did you pronounce that name? why do you evoke that phantom in the midst of our woods, our flowers, our happiness?"

"You told me, I think," said Jeanne, "that M. de Bussy showed much interest in you."

Diana reddened, even to her round pretty ears.

"He is a charming creature," continued Jeanne, kissing Diana.

"It is folly," said Diana; "M. de Bussy thinks no more of Diana de Meridor."

"That is possible; but I believe he pleases Diana de Monsoreau a little."

"Do not say that."

"Does it displease you?"

"I tell you he thinks no more of me; and he does well—oh, I was cowardly."

"What do you say?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"Now, Diana, do not cry, do not ac-

cuse yourself. You cowardly! you, my heroine! you were constrained."

"I believed it; I saw dangers, gulfs under my feet. Now, Jeanne, these dangers seem to me chimerical, these gulfs as if a child could cross them. I was cowardly, I tell you; oh, I had no time to reflect."

"You speak in enigmas."

"No," cried Diana, rising, "it was not my fault, it was his. The Duc d'Anjou was against him; but when one wishes a thing, when one loves, neither prince nor master should keep you back. See, Jeanne, if I loved—"

"Be calm, dear friend."

"I tell you, *we* were cowardly."

"'We!' of whom do you speak? That 'we' is eloquent, my dearest Diana."

"I mean my father and I; you did not think anything else, did you? My father is a nobleman—he might have spoken to the king; I am proud, and do not fear a man when I hate him. But *he* did not love me."

"You lie to yourself! you know the contrary, little hypocrite!"

"You may believe in love, Jeanne, you, whom M. de St. Luc married in spite of the king; you, whom he carried away from Paris; you, who pay him by your caresses for proscription and exile."

"And he thinks himself richly repaid."

"But I—reflect a little, do not be egotistical—I, whom that fiery young man pretended to love—I, who fixed the regards of that invincible Bussy, he who fears no one—I was alone with him in the cloister of L'Egyptienne—we were alone; but for Gertrude and Remy, our accomplices, he could have carried me off. At that moment I saw him suffering because of me; I saw his eyes languishing, his lips pale and parched with fever. If he had asked me to die to restore the brightness to his eyes, and the freshness to his lips, I should have died. Well, I went away, and he never tried to detain me. Wait still. He knew that I was leaving Paris, that I was returning to Meridor; he knew that M. de Monsoreau—I blush as I tell it—was only my husband in name; he knew that I traveled alone; and along the road, dear Jeanne, I kept turning, thinking I heard the gallop of his horse behind us. But no, it was only the echo of my own. I tell you he does not think of me. I am not worth a journey to Anjou while there are so many beautiful women at the court of France, whose smiles are worth a hundred confessions from the provincial, buried at Meridor. Do you understand now? Am I forgotten, despised—"

She had not finished when the foliage of the oak rustled, a quantity of mortar and moss fell from the old wall, and a man threw himself at the feet of Diana, who uttered an affrighted cry.

Jeanne ran away—she recognized him.

"Here I am!" cried Bussy, kissing the dress of Diana.

She too recognized him, and, overcome by this unexpected happiness, fell unconscious into the arms of him whom she had just accused of indifference.

CHAPTER LIV.

BUSSY AND DIANA.

FAINTINGS from love seldom last any length of time, nor are they very dangerous. Diana was not long in opening her eyes, and finding herself supported by Bussy.

"Oh!" murmured she, "it was shocking, count, to surprise us thus."

Bussy expected other words, men are so exacting, but Diana said no more, and, disengaging herself gently from his arms, ran to her friend, who, seeing her faint, had returned softly, and stood a little way off.

"Is it thus that you receive me, madame?"

"No, M. de Bussy, but—"

"Oh! no 'but,' madame," sighed Bussy, drawing near again.

"No, no, not on your knees!"

"Oh! let me pray to you an instant, thus!" cried the count. "I have so longed for this place."

"Yes, but to come to it, you jumped over the wall. Not only is it not suitable for a man of your rank, but it is very imprudent."

"How so?"

"If you had been seen?"

"Who could have seen me?"

"Our hunters, who, a quarter of an hour ago, passed by this wall."

"Do not be uneasy, madame, I hide myself too carefully to be seen."

"Hidden! really!" said Jeanne, "tell us how, M. de Bussy."

"Firstly, if I did not join you on the road, it was not my fault, I took one route and you another. You came by Rambouillet, and I by Chartres. And then judge if your poor Bussy be not in love; I did not dare to join you. It was not in the presence of your father and your servants that I wished to meet you again, for I did not desire to compromise you, so I made the journey stage by stage, devoured by impatience. At last you arrived. I had taken a lodging in the village, and, concealed behind the window, I saw you pass."

"Oh! mon Dieu! are you then at Angers under your own name?"

"For what do you take me? I am a traveling merchant; look at my costume, it is of a color much worn among drapers and goldsmiths. I have not been remarked."

"Bussy, the handsome Bussy, two days in a provincial town and not remarked; who would believe that at court?" said Jeanne.

"Continue, count," said Diana, blushing; "how do you come here from the town?"

"I have two horses of a chosen race; I leave the village on one, stopping to look at all the signs and writings, but when out of sight my horse takes to a gallop, which brings him the four miles in half an hour. Once in the wood of Meridor, I ride to the park wall, but it is very long, for the park is large. Yesterday I explored this wall for more than four hours, climbing up here and there, hoping to see you. At last, when I was almost in despair, I saw you in the evening returning to the house; the two great dogs of the baron were jumping round you. When you had disappeared, I jumped over, and saw the marks on the grass where you had been sitting. I fancied you might have adopted this place, which is charming, during the heat of the sun, so I broke away some branches that I might know it again, and sighing, which hurts me dreadfully—"

"From want of habit," said Jeanne.

"I do not say no, madame; well, then, sighing, I retook my way to the town. I was very tired, I had torn my dress in climbing trees, but I had seen you, and I was happy."

"It is an admirable recital," said Jeanne, "and you have surmounted dreadful obstacles; it is quite heroic; but in your place I would have preserved my doublet, and, above all, have taken care of my white hands. Look at yours, how frightful they are with scratches."

"Yes, but then I should not have seen her whom I came to see."

"On the contrary, I should have seen her better than you did."

"What would you have done then?"

"I would have gone straight to the chateau de Meridor. M. le Baron would have pressed me in his arms, Madame de Monsoreau would have placed me by her at table, M. de St. Luc would have been delighted to see me, and his wife also. It was the simplest thing in the world, but lovers never think of what is straight before them."

Bussy smiled at Diana. "Oh, no," he said, "that would not have done for me."

"Then I no longer understand what good manners are."

"No," said Bussy, "I could not go to the castle; M. le Baron would watch his daughter."

"Good!" said Jeanne, "here is a lesson for me," and kissing Diana on the forehead, she ran away. Diana tried to stop her, but Bussy seized her hands, and she let her friend go. They remained alone.

"Have I not done well, madame," said Bussy, "and do you not approve?"

"I do not desire to feign," said Diana, "besides, it would be useless; you know I approve; but here must stop my indulgence; in calling for you as I did just now I was mad—I was guilty."

"Mon Dieu! What do you say?"

"Alas! count, the truth; I have a right to make M. de Monsoreau unhappy, to withhold from him my smiles and my love, but I have no right to bestow them on another: for, after all, he is my master."

"Now, you will let me speak, will you not?"

"Speak!"

"Well! of all that you have just said, you do not find one word in your heart."

"How!"

"Listen patiently; you have overwhelmed me with sophisms. The commonplaces of morality do not apply here; this man is your master, you say, but did you choose him? No; fate imposed him on you, and you submitted. Now, do you mean to suffer all your life the consequences of this odious constraint? I will deliver you from it."

Diana tried to speak, but Bussy stopped her.

"Oh! I know what you are going to say; that if I provoke M. de Monsoreau and kill him, you will see me no more. So be it; I may die of grief, but you will live free and happy, and you may render happy some gallant man, who in his joy will sometimes bless my name, and cry, 'Thanks, Bussy, thanks for having delivered us from that dreadful Monsoreau;' and you, yourself, Diana, who will not dare to thank me while living, will thank me dead."

Diana seized his hand.

"You have not yet implored me, Bussy; you begin with menaces."

"Menace you! oh! could I have such an intention, I, who love you so ardently, Diana. I know you love me; do not deny it, I know it, for you have avowed it. Here, on my knees before you, my hand on my heart, which has never lied, either from interest or from fear, I say to you, Diana, I love you, for my whole life. Diana, I swear to you, that if I die for you, it will be in adoring you. If you still say to me, 'Go,' I will go without a sigh, or complaint, from this place where I am so happy, and I should say, 'This woman does not love me, and will never love me.' Then I should go away, and you would see me no more; but as my devotion for you is great, my desire to see you happy would survive the certainty that I could never be happy myself."

Bussy said this with so much emotion, and, at the same time firmness, that Diana felt sure that he would do all he said, and she cried—

"Thanks, count, for you take from me all remorse by your threats."

Saying these words, she gave him her hand, which he kissed passionately. Then they heard the light steps of Jeanne, accompanied by a warning cough. Instinctively the clasped hands parted. Jeanne saw it.

"Pardon, my good friends, for disturbing you," said she, "but we must go in if we do not wish to be sent for. M. le Comte, regain, if you please, your excellent horse, and let us go to the house. See what you lose by your obstinacy, M. de Bussy, a dinner at the chateau, which is not to be despised by a man who has had a long ride, and has been climbing trees, without counting all the amusement we could have had, or the glances that might have passed. Come, Diana, come away."

Bussy looked at the two friends with a smile. Diana held out her hand to him.

"Is that all?" said he; "have you nothing to say?"

"Till to-morrow," replied she.

"Only to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, and always."

Bussy uttered a joyful exclamation, pressed his lips to her hand, and ran off. Diana watched him till he was out of sight.

"Now!" said Jeanne, when he had disappeared, "will you talk to me a little?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well! to-morrow I shall go to the chase with St. Luc and your father."

"What, you will leave me alone at the chateau!"

"Listen, dear friend; I also have my principles, and there are certain things that I cannot consent to do."

"Oh, Jeanne!" cried Diana, growing pale, "can you say such things to me?"

"Yes, I cannot continue thus."

"I thought you loved me, Jeanne. What cannot you continue?"

"Continue to prevent two poor lovers from talking to each other at their ease."

Diana seized in her arms the laughing young woman.

"Listen!" said Jeanne, "there are the hunters calling us, and poor St. Luc is impatient."

CHAPTER LV.

HOW BUSSY WAS OFFERED THREE HUNDRED PISTOLES FOR HIS HORSE, AND PARTED WITH HIM FOR NOTHING.

THE next day, Bussy left Angers before the most wakeful bourgeois had had their breakfast. He flew along the road, and Diana, mounted on a terrace in front of the castle, saw him coming, and went to meet him. The sun had scarcely risen over the great oaks, and the grass was still wet with dew, when she heard from afar, as she went along, the horn of St. Luc, which Jeanne incited him to sound. She arrived at the meeting-place just as Bussy appeared on the wall. The day passed like an hour. What had they to say? That they loved each other. What had they to wish for? They were together.

"Diana," said Bussy at length, "it seems to me as though my life had begun only to-day. You have shown me what it is to live."

"And I," replied she, "who not long ago would have willingly thrown myself into the arms of death, would now tremble to die and lose your love. But why do you not come to the castle? My father would be glad to see you, and M. de St. Luc is your friend."

"Alas, Diana, if I came once, I should be always there; all the province would know it, and if it came to the ears of that ogre, your husband, he would hasten here. You forbid me to deliver you from him—"——"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, for the safety of our happiness, we must guard our secret. Madame de St. Luc knows it, and her husband soon will. I have written him a line this morning, asking him for an interview at Angers, and when he comes I will make him promise never to breathe a word of this. It is the more important, dear Diana, as doubtless they are seeking me everywhere. Things looked grave when I left Paris."

"You are right; and then my father is so scrupulous that, in spite of his love for me, he is capable of denouncing me to M. de Monsoreau."

"Let us hide ourselves well, then; I fear some evil spirit, jealous of our happiness."

"Say adieu to me, then; and do not ride so fast—your horse frightens me."

"Fear nothing; he knows the way, and is the gentlest and safest horse I ever rode. When I return to the city, buried in sweet thoughts, he takes the way without my touching the bridle."

At last the sound of the returning chase was heard, the horns playing an air agreed upon with Jeanne, and Bussy left. As he approached the city, he remarked that the time was approaching when the gates of the city would be closed. He was preparing to ride on quickly, when he heard behind him the gallop of horses. For a lover who wishes to remain concealed, as for a robber, everything seems a menace. Bussy asked himself whether he should ride on or draw up and let them pass, but their course was so rapid that they were up to him in a moment. There were two.

"Here is the city," said one, with a Gascon accent; "three hundred more blows with the whip, and one hundred with the spur; courage and vigor!"

"The beast has no more breath—he shivers and totters; he will not go on; and yet I would give a hundred horses to be in my city before nightfall."

"It is some Angers man out late," thought Bussy. "But look, the horse is falling; take care, monsieur," cried he; "quit your horse—he is about to fall."

Indeed, as he spoke the animal fell heavily on his side, shook his legs convulsively, then suddenly his breath stopped, his eyes grew dim, and he was dead.

"Monsieur!" cried the cavalier to Bussy, "three hundred pistoles for your horse!"

"Ah, mon Dieu!" cried Bussy, drawing near.

"Do you hear me, monsieur? I am in haste."

"Ah! my prince, take it for nothing," cried Bussy, who had recognized the Duc d'Anjou.

At the same moment they heard the click of a pistol, which was cocked by the duke's companion.

"Stop, M. d'Aubigne," cried the duke, "it is Bussy, I believe."

"Oh! yes, my prince, it is I. But what, in Heaven's name, are you doing, killing horses on the road at this hour?"

"Ah! is it M. de Bussy?" said D'Aubigne, "then you do not want me any more. Permit me to return to him who sent me?"——"Not without receiving my sincere thanks and the promise of a lasting friendship."

"I accept it, monseigneur, and will recall your words to you some day."

"M. d'Aubigné! I am in the clouds," murmured Bussy.

"Did you not know? As you are here, did you not expect me?" said the prince, with an air of suspicion which did not escape Bussy, who began to reflect that his secret residence in Anjou might seem very strange to the prince.

"I did better than expect you," said Bussy, "and as you wish to enter the town before the gates are closed, jump into the saddle, monseigneur."

The prince accepted, and Bussy mounted behind him, asking himself if this prince, dressed in black, were not the evil spirit sent already to disturb his happiness.

"Where do we go now, monseigneur?" said he, as they entered the city.

"To the castle. Let them hoist my banner and convoke the nobility of the district."

"Nothing more easy," said Bussy, full of surprise, but willing to be docile. The news was soon spread through the city that the duke had arrived, and a crowd soon collected.

"Gentlemen!" cried the duke, "I have come to throw myself into my good city of Angers. At Paris the most terrible dangers have menaced my life—I had lost even my liberty. I succeeded in escaping, thanks to some good friends, and now I am here I feel my tranquillity and my life assured."

The people cried, "Long live our seigneur."

"Now let me sup," said the prince, "I have had nothing since the morning."

The city was illuminated, guns were fired, the bells of the cathedral were rung, and the wind carried to Meridor the noisy joy of the good Angevins.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DIPLOMACY OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

WHEN the duke and Bussy were left alone, the duke said, "Let us talk."

Francois, who was very quick, had perceived that Bussy had made more advances to him than usual, therefore he judged that he was in some embarrassing situation, and that he might, by a little address, get an advantage over him. But Bussy had had time to prepare himself, and he was quite ready.

"Yes, let us talk, monseigneur," replied he.

"The last day I saw you, my poor Bussy, you were very ill."

"It is true, monseigneur, I was very ill, and it was almost a miracle that saved me."

"There was near you a doctor very devoted to you, for he growled at every one who approached you."

"True, prince, Remy loves me."

"He kept you rigorously to your bed, did he not?"

"At which I was in a great rage, as your highness might have seen."

"But, if that were the case, why did you not send the doctor to the devil, and come out with me as I begged you to do? But as it was a grave affair, you were afraid to compromise yourself."

"Did you say I was afraid?"

"I did say so."

"Well, then, it was a lie!" said Bussy, jumping up from his chair; "you lied to yourself, monseigneur, for you do not believe a single word of what you say. There are twenty scars on my body, which prove the contrary. I never knew fear, and, ma foi, I know people who cannot say the same."

"You have always unanswerable arguments, M. de Bussy," cried the duke,

turning very pale; "when you are accused, you cry louder than your accuser, and then you think you are right."

"Oh! I am not always right, I know well, but I know on what occasions I am wrong."

"And what are they?"

"When I serve ungrateful people."

"Really, monsieur, I think you forget yourself," said the duke, with some dignity. Bussy moved toward the door, but the prince stopped him.

"Do you deny, monsieur," said he, "that after refusing to go out with me, you went out immediately after?"

"I deny nothing, monseigneur, but I will not be forced to confession."

"Tell me why you would not go out with me."

"I had business."

"At home?"

"Or elsewhere."

"I thought that when a gentleman was in the service of a prince, his principal business was that of the prince."

"And who does your business generally, monseigneur, if not I?"

"I do not say no; generally I find you faithful and devoted, and, I will say more, I excuse your bad humor."

"You are very good."

"Yes, for you had some reason to be angry."

"Ah! you confess it."

"Yes, I promised you the disgrace of M. de Monsoreau. It seems you hate him very much."

"I! not at all. I find him very ugly, and should have liked him away from court, not to have had to look at him. It seems, however, that you admire him, and there is no accounting for tastes."

"Well, then, as that was your sole excuse, you were doubly wrong to refuse to accompany me, and then to go out after, and commit follies."

"Follies! what did I do?"

"Doubtless, you do not like MM. d'Epernon and Schomberg, neither do I, but one must have some prudence. Kill them, and I should be grateful to you, but do not exasperate them."

"What did I do to them?"

"Why, you had D'Epernon stoned."

"I!"

"Yes, so that his clothes were torn to pieces."

"Good! and what about M. Schomberg?"

"You will not deny that you had him dyed indigo color? When I saw him three hours after, he was still bright blue. Do you call that a joke?" And the prince laughed in spite of himself, and Bussy joined him.

"Then," said he, "they think it was I who played them these tricks!"

"Perhaps it was I."

"And you have the conscience to reproach a man who had such fine ideas."

"Well, I pardon you. But I have another complaint to make. What did you do to deliver me from my unlucky situation?"

"You see, I came to Anjou."

"It seems to me that you would have been more useful nearer."

"Ah! there we differ; I preferred coming to Anjou."

"Your caprice is a bad reason."

"But, if I came to gather your partisans?"

"Ah! that is different. What have you done?"

"I will explain that to you to-morrow; at present I must leave you."

"Why?"

"I have to see an important person."

"Oh, very well; but be prudent."

"Prudent! are we not the strongest here?"

"Never mind; risk nothing. Have you done much?"

"I have only been here two days."

"But you keep yourself concealed, I hope."

"I should think so. Look at my dress; am I in the habit of wearing cinnamon-colored clothes?"

"And where are you lodging?"

"Ah! I hope you will appreciate my devotion; in a tumble-down old house, near the ramparts. But you, my prince, how did you get out of the Louvre? How was it that I found you on the road, with M. d'Aubigne for a companion?"

"Because I have friends."

"You! friends!"

"Yes, friends that you do not know."

"Well, and who are they?"

"The king of Navarre and D'Aubigne, whom you saw."

"The king of Navarre! Ah! true, did you not conspire together?"

"I never conspired, M. de Bussy."

"No; ask poor La Mole and Coconnas."

"La Mole," said the prince, gloomily, "died for another crime than the one alleged against him."

"Well, never mind him. How the devil did you get out of the Louvre?"

"Through the window."

"Which window?"

"That of my bedroom."

"Then you knew of the rope-ladder?"

"What rope-ladder?"

"In the cupboard."

"Ah! it seems you knew it," cried the prince, turning pale.

"Oh! your highness knows I have sometimes had the happiness of entering that room."

"In the time of my sister Margot. Then you came in by the window?"

"As you came out. All that astonishes me is, that you knew of the ladder."

"It was not I who found it."

"Who, then?"

"I was told of it."——"By whom?"

"By the king of Navarre."

"Ah! the king of Navarre knew of it; I should not have thought so. However, now you are here safe and sound, we will put Anjou in flames, and Béarn and Angoumois will catch the light, so we shall have a fine blaze."

"But did you not speak of a rendezvous?"

"It is true; the interest of the conversation was making me forget. Adieu, monseigneur."

"Do you take your horse?"

"If it will be useful to you, monseigneur, you may keep it, I have another."

"Well! I accept; we will settle that later."

The duke gave Bussy his hand, and they separated.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE IDEAS OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

Bussy returned home, but instead of St. Luc, whom he expected, he found only a letter fixing their meeting for the next day. About six in the morning St. Luc started, and rode straight to Bussy's house.

"Accept the hospitality of my poor hut, St. Luc," said Bussy, "I am encamped here."

"Yes, like a conqueror on the field of battle."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, dear Bussy, that my wife has no secrets from me, and has told me all. Receive my compliments, but, since you have sent for me, permit me to give you a piece of advice."

"Well."

"Get rid as soon as possible of that abominable Monsoreau; no one at the court knows of your love for his wife, so when you marry the widow, no one will say you killed him on purpose."

"There is but one obstacle to this project, which presented itself to my mind, as to yours."

"What is it?"

"That I have sworn to Diana to respect the life of her husband as long as he does not attack me."

"You were very wrong."

"Why so?"

"Because if you do not take the initiative, he will discover you, and will kill you."

"I cannot break my oath to Diana. Besides, he who is now a monster in all eyes, would be thought an angel in his tomb."

"Therefore I do not advise you to kill him yourself."

"Oh, St. Luc, no assassins."

"Who spoke of assassins?"

"Of what then?"

"Nothing; an idea passed through my mind; I will tell you what it was at another time. I do not love this Monsoreau much more than you, although I have not the same reason to detest him, so let us speak of the wife instead of the husband."

Bussy smiled. "You are a capital com-

panion, St. Luc," said he, "and you may count on my friendship. Now my friendship consists of three things, my purse, my sword, and my life. Now, what about Diana?"

"I wished to ask if you were not coming to Meridor."

"My dear friend, I thank you, but you know my scruples."

"I know all. At Meridor you fear to meet Monsoreau, although he is eighty leagues off; fear to have to shake his hand, and it is hard to shake the hand of the man you wish to strangle; you fear to see him embrace Diana, and it is hard to see that of the woman you love."

"Ah! how well you understand!" cried Bussy, with rage; "but, my dear friend, did you not hear last night the noise of bells and guns?"

"Yes; and we wondered what it meant."

"It meant that the Duc d'Anjou arrived last night."

St. Luc jumped up. "The duke here! We heard he was imprisoned at the Louvre."

"That is just why he is now at Angers. He managed to escape through a window, and came here."

"Well?"

"Well, here is an excellent opportunity to revenge yourself for the king's persecutions. The prince has already a party; he will soon have troops, and we shall have something like a little civil war."

"Oh! oh!"

"And I reckoned on you to help us."

"Against the king?" said St. Luc, with sudden coldness.

"Not precisely against the king, but against those who fight against us."

"My dear Bussy, I came here for country air, not to fight against his majesty."

"But let me present you to monseigneur."

"Useless, my dear Bussy, I do not like Angers."

"My dear St. Luc, you will do me a great service by consenting; the duke asked me what I came here for, and, not being able to tell, because of his own passion for Diana, I said that I had come to draw to his cause all the gentlemen in the canton; I even told him I had a rendezvous with one this morning."

"Well! tell him you have seen the gentleman, and that he asks six months to consider. Listen, I will always help you to defend Diana, you shall help me to defend my wife. We will make a treaty for love, but not for politics."

"I see, I must yield to you, St. Luc, for you have the advantage over me. I want you, and you do not want me."

"On the contrary, it is I who claim your protection."

"How so?"

"Suppose the rebels besiege and sack Meridor."

The two friends laughed; then, as the duke had sent to inquire for Bussy, they separated with renewed promises of friendship, and charmed with each other.

Bussy went to the ducal palace, where already all the nobility of the provinces were arriving. He hastened to arrange an official reception, a repast and speeches, and having thus cut out some hours' occupation for the prince, mounted his other horse, and galloped to Meridor. The duke made some good speeches, and produced a great effect, giving himself out for a prince persecuted by the king on account of the love of the Parisians for him. When Bussy returned, it was four in the afternoon; he dismounted, and presented himself to the duke all covered with dust.

"Ah! my brave Bussy, you have been at work?"

"You see, monseigneur."

"You are very hot."

"I have ridden fast."

"Take care not to get ill again."

"There is no danger."

"Whence do you come?"

"From the environs. Is your highness content? have you had a numerous assemblage?"

"Yes, I am pretty well satisfied, but I missed some one."——"Who?"

"Your protégé, the Baron de Meridor."

Bussy changed color.

"And yet we must not neglect him," continued the duke, "he is influential here."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. He was the correspondent of the League at Angers, chosen by M. de Guise, and the Guises choose their men well. He must come, Bussy."

"But if he does not come?"

"I will go to him."

"To Meridor?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, why not, certainly," cried Bussy, with flashing eyes, "a prince may do anything."

"Then you think he is still angry with me?"

"How should I know?"

"You have not seen him?"

"No."

"As one of the great men of the province, I thought—"

"I was not sufficiently fortunate in the former promises I made him to be in a hurry to present myself to him."

"Has he not attained his object?"

"How so?"

"He wanted his daughter to marry the count, and she has done so."

Bussy turned his back on the duke, who, at the same moment, moved toward another gentleman who entered the room. Bussy began to reflect on what the duke's projects were with regard to the baron—whether they were purely political, or whether he was still seeking to approach Diana; but he imagined that, embroiled with his brother, banished from the Louvre, and the chief of a provincial insurrection, he had sufficiently grave interests at stake to outweigh his love fancies. He passed the night banqueting with the duke and the Angevin gentlemen, then in dancing with the Angevin ladies. It is needless to say that he was the admiration of the latter, and the hatred of the husbands, several of whom looked at him in a way which did not please him, so that, curling his mustachios, he invited three or four of them to take a walk with him by moonlight; but his reputation had preceded him, and they all declined.

At the door Bussy found a laughing face waiting for him, which he believed to be eighty leagues off.

"Ah!" cried he joyfully, "it is you, Remy."

"Yes, monsieur."

"I was going to write to you to join me."

"Really!"——"On my word."

"That is capital; I was afraid you would scold me."

"For what?"

"For coming without leave. But I heard that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou had escaped, and had fled here. I knew you were here also, and I thought there might be civil war, and many holes made in skins, so I came."

"You did well, Remy; I wanted you."

"How is Gertrude, monsieur?"

"I will ask Diana the first time I see her."

"And, in return, every time I see her I will ask for news of Madame de Monsoreau."

"You are charming."

Meanwhile they had reached Bussy's lodging.

"Here is my palace; you must lodge as you can."

"It will not be difficult; I could sleep standing, I am so tired."

Bussy rose early the next morning, and went to the ducal palace, leaving word for Remy to follow him. The duke had prepared a list of important things to be done: firstly, a walk round the walls to examine the fortifications; secondly, a review of the inhabitants and their arms; thirdly, a visit to the arsenal; fourthly, correspondence.

"Ah!" cried the duke, "you already!"

"Ma foi! yes, monseigneur; I could not sleep, your highness's interests were so much on my mind. What shall we do this morning? Shall we hunt?"

"How!" said the duke, "you pretend to have been thinking all night of my interests, and the result of so much meditation is to propose to me a hunt!"

"True," said Bussy; "besides, we have no hounds."

"And no chief huntsman."

"Ah, ma foi! the chase would be more agreeable without him."

"Ah, I am not like you—I want him; he would have been very useful to us here."

"How so?"

"He has property here."

"He!"

"He or his wife."

Bussy bit his lips.

"Meridor is only three leagues off, you know that," continued the duke, "you, who brought the old baron to me."

"Dame! I brought him because he hung on to my cloak. However, my protection did not do him much good."

"Listen," said the duke, "I have an idea."

"Diable!" said Bussy, who was always suspicious of the duke's ideas.

"Yes; it is that, if Monsoreau had the advantage over you at first, you shall have it now."

"What do you mean?"

"It is very simple; you know me, Bussy?"

"I have that misfortune."

"Think you I am the man to submit to an affront with impunity?"

"Explain yourself, monseigneur."

"Well, he stole the young girl I loved to make her his wife; now I will steal his wife!"

Bussy tried to smile, but made a grimace instead. "Steal his wife!" stammered he.

"Nothing more easy, she is here, and you told me she hated her husband; therefore, without too much vanity, I may flatter myself she will give me the preference, if I promise her—"

"What, monseigneur?"

"To get rid of her husband for her."

"You will do that?"

"You shall see. Meanwhile I will pay a visit to Meridor."

"You will dare?"

"Why not?"

"You will present yourself before the old baron, whom you abandoned after promising me—"

"I have an excellent excuse to give him."

"Where the devil will you find it?"

"Oh! I will say to him, I did not break this marriage, because Monsoreau, who knew that you were one of the principal agents to the League, threatened to denounce you to the king."

"Has your highness invented that?"

"Not entirely."

"Then I understand."

"Yes, I shall make him believe that by marrying his daughter I saved his life."

"It is superb."

"Well! order the horses, and we will go to Meridor."

"Immediately, monseigneur." Bussy then went to the door, but turned back and said, "How many horses will your highness have?"

"Oh, four or five, what you like."

"If you leave it to me, I shall take a hundred."

"What for?" cried the prince, surprised.

"To have at least twenty-five I can rely on in case of attack."

"Attack!"

"Yes, I have heard that there are thick woods in that neighborhood, and it would not surprise me if we fell into some ambush."

"Ah, do you think so?"

"Monseigneur knows that true courage does not exclude prudence; I will order one hundred and fifty." And he moved toward the door.

"A moment," said the prince. "Do you think I am in safety at Angers?"

"Why, the town is not very strong, but well defended—"

"Yes, but it may be badly defended; however brave you are, you can be but in one place at a time."

"True."

"Then if I am not in safety here—and I am not if Bussy doubts—"

"I did not say I doubted."

"If I am not safe, I had better make myself so. I will go to the castle and intrench myself."

"You are right, monseigneur."

"And then another idea."

"The morning is fruitful."

"I will make the Meridors come here."

"Monseigneur, you are grand to-day. Now let us visit the castle."

Bussy went out while the prince was getting ready, and found Remy waiting. He wrote hastily a little note, picked a bunch of roses from the conservatory, rolled the note round the stems, went to the stable, brought out his horse, and, putting Remy on it, and giving him the bouquet, led him out of the city.

"Now," said he, "let Roland go; at the end of this road you will find the forest, in the forest a park, round the park a wall, and at that part of the wall where Roland stops, throw over this bouquet."

"He whom you expect does not come," said the note, "because he who was not expected has come, and is more menacing than ever, for he loves still. Take with the lips and the heart all that is invisible to the eyes in this paper."

In half an hour Remy reached his destination, carried by his horse, and threw over the bouquet; a little cry from the other side told him it had been received. Then Remy returned, in spite of his horse, which seemed much put out at losing its accustomed repast on the acorns. Remy joined Bussy as he was exploring a cave with the prince.

"Well," said he to his messenger, "what did you hear or see?"

"A wall, a cry, seven leagues," replied Remy, laconically.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A FLIGHT OF ANGEVINS.

Bussy contrived to occupy the duke so well with his preparations for war during two days, that he found no time to think of Meridor, and from time to time, under pretext of examining the outer fortifications, jumped on Roland, and arrived at a certain wall, which he got over all the more quickly because each time he made some stone fall, and was, in fact, gradually making a breach.

Toward the end of the third day, as an enormous convoy of provisions was entering the city, the produce of a tax levied by the duke on his good Angevins, as M. d'Anjou, to make himself popular, was tasting the black bread and salt fish of the soldiers, they heard a great noise at one of the gates of the city, where a man, mounted on a white horse, had presented himself. Now Bussy had had himself named captain-general of Anjou, and had established the most severe discipline in Angers; no one could go out of or enter the town without a password; all which had no other aim than to prevent the duke from sending a messenger to Meridor without his knowledge.

The man on the white horse had arrived at a furious gallop, and had attempted to enter, but had been stopped.

"I am Antragues," said he, "and desire to speak to the Duc d'Anjou."

"We do not know Antragues," they replied, "but as for seeing the duke, you shall be satisfied, for we shall arrest you, and conduct you to him."

"You are a nice fellow, truly, to talk of arresting Charles Balzac d'Antragues, baron de Cuneo, and comte de Graville."

"We will do so, however," replied the bourgeois, who had twenty men behind him.

"Wait a little, my good friends. You do not know the Parisians. Well, I will show you a specimen of what they can do."

"Let us arrest him!" cried the furious militia.

"Softly, my little lambs of Anjou; it is I who will have that pleasure."

"What does he say?" asked the bourgeois.

"He says that his horse has only gone ten leagues, and will ride over you all." And drawing his sword and swinging it furiously round, he cut off in his passage the blades of the nearest halberds, and in less than ten minutes fifteen or twenty of them were changed into broom handles.

"Ah! this is very amusing!" cried he, laughing, and as he spoke stunning one of the bourgeois with a blow on the head with the flat of his sword. However, as more and more bourgeois crowded to the attack, and Antragues began to feel tired, he said, "Well, you are as brave as lions; I will bear witness to it; but, you see, you have nothing left but the handles of your halberds, and you do not know how to load your muskets. I had resolved to

enter the city, but I did not know it was guarded by an army of Cæsars. I renounce my victory over you. Good-evening, I am going away; only tell the prince that I came here expressly to see him."

However, the captain had managed to communicate the fire to the match of his musket, but just as he was raising it to his shoulder, Antragues gave him such a furious blow upón the fingers that he dropped it.

"Kill him! kill him!" cried several voices, "do not let him escape!"

"Ah!" said Antragues, "just now you would not let me come in, now you will not let me go out. Take care, that will change my tactics, and instead of the flat of my sword, I will use the point—instead of cutting the halberds, I will cut the wrists. Now, will you let me go?"

"No, no, he is tired, kill him!"

"Well, then, take care of your hands!"

Scarcely had he spoken when another cavalier appeared, riding furiously also, and who cried out as he approached:

"Antragues, what are you doing among all these bourgeois?"

"Livarot!" cried Antragues. "Mon Dieu, you are welcome; Montjoie and St. Denis, to the rescue!"

"I heard four hours ago that you were before me, and I have been trying to catch you. But what is the matter; do they want to massacre you?"

"Yes, they will neither let me in nor out."

"Gentlemen!" said Livarot, "will you please to step either to the right or left, and let us pass."

"They insult us! kill them!" cried the people.

"Oh! this is Angers' manners!" said Livarot, drawing his sword.

"Yes, you see; unluckily, there are so many of them."

"If there were but three of us!"

"And here is Ribeirac coming."

"Do you hear him?"

"I see him. Here, Ribeirac!"

"Are you fighting?" cried Ribeirac.

"Good-morning, Livarot; good-morning, Antragues."

"Let us charge them," said Antragues.

The bourgeois looked in stupefaction at this re-enforcement that was about to join the attacking party. "They are a regiment," said the captain of the militia.

"This is only the advanced guard," cried another.

"We are fathers of families, and our lives belong to our children," said others, and they all tried to fly, fighting with each other to get out of the way.

At this stage of the affair Bussy and the prince arrived, followed by twenty cavaliers, to ascertain the cause of the tumult. They were told that it was three incarnate devils from Paris who were making all the disturbance.

"Three men, Bussy; see who they are."

Bussy raised himself in his stirrups, and his quick eye soon recognized Livarot.

"Mort de ma vie, monseigneur," cried he, "they are our friends from Paris who are besieging us."

"No!" cried Livarot, "on the contrary, it is these people who are killing us."

"Down with your arms, knaves," cried the duke, "these are friends."

"Friends!" cried the bourgeois, "then they should have had the password; for we have been treating them like Pagans, and they us like Turks."

Livarot, Antragues, and Ribeirac advanced in triumph to kiss the duke's hand.

"Monseigneur," said Bussy, "how many militia do you think there were here?"

"At least one hundred and fifty."

"You have not very famous soldiers, since three men beat them."

"True, but I shall have the three men who did beat them."

CHAPTER LIX.

ROLAND.

THANKS to the re-enforcement which had arrived, M. le Duc d'Anjou could go where he pleased; he explored the ramparts of the surrounding country and castles. The Angevin gentlemen found liberty and amusement at the court of the duke, and the three friends were soon intimate with

many of these nobles, especially those who had pretty wives. The general joy was at its height when twenty-two riding horses, thirty carriage horses, and forty mules, together with litters, carriages, and wagons, arrived at Angers, all the property of the duke. We must allow that the saddles were not paid for, and that the coffers were empty, but still it made a magnificent effect. The duke's reputation for wealth was henceforward solidly established, and all the province remained convinced that he was rich enough to war against all Europe if need were, therefore they did not grudge the new tax which the prince imposed upon them. People never mind giving or lending to rich people, only to poor ones; therefore the worthy prince lived like a patriarch on all the fat of the land. Numerous cavaliers arrived to offer to him their adhesion, or their offers of service. One afternoon, however, about four o'clock, M. de Monsoreau arrived on horseback at the gates of Angers. He had ridden eighteen leagues that day; therefore his spurs were red, and his horse covered with foam and half dead. They no longer made difficulties about letting strangers enter, therefore M. de Monsoreau went straight through the city to the palace, and asked for the duke.

"He is out reconnoitering," replied the sentinel.

"Where?"

"I do not know."

"Diable! what I have to say to him is very pressing."

"First put your horse in the stable, or he will fall."

"The advice is good; where are the stables?"

As he spoke a man approached and asked for his name. M. de Monsoreau gave it. The major-domo (for it was he) bowed respectfully, for the chief huntsman's name was well known in Anjou.

"Monsieur," said he, "please to enter and take some repose. Monseigneur has not been out more than ten minutes, and will not be back till eight o'clock."

"Eight o'clock! I cannot wait so long; I am the bearer of news which cannot be too soon known to his highness. Can I not have a horse and a guide?"

"There are plenty of horses, but a guide is a different thing, for his highness did not say where he was going."

"Well, I will take a fresh horse, and try to discover him."

"Probably you will hear where he has passed, monsieur."

"Do they ride fast?"

"Oh! no."

"Well, get me a horse then."

"Will monsieur come into the stables and choose one? they all belong to the duke." Monsoreau entered. Ten or twelve fine horses, quite fresh, were feeding from the manger, which was filled with grain.

Monsoreau looked over them, and then said, "I will take this bay."

"Roland?"

"Is that his name?"

"Yes, and it is his highness's favorite horse. M. de Bussy gave him to the duke, and it is quite a chance that it is here to-day."

Roland was soon saddled, and Monsoreau rode out of the stable.

"In which direction did they start?" asked he. The man pointed it out.

"Ma foi!" said Monsoreau, "the horse seems to know the way."

Indeed, the animal set off without being urged, and went deliberately out of the city, took a short cut to the gate, and then began to accelerate his pace: Monsoreau let him go. He went along the boulevard, then turned into a shady lane which cut across the country, passing gradually from a trot to a gallop.

"Oh!" thought Monsoreau, as they entered the woods, "one would say we were going to Meridor. Can his highness be there?" and his face grew black at the thought.

"Oh!" murmured he, "I who was going to see the prince, and putting off till to-morrow to see my wife; shall I see them both at the same time?"

The horse went on, turning always to the right.

"We cannot be far from the park," said he.

At that moment his horse neighed, and

another answered him. In a minute Monsoreau saw a wall, and a horse tied to a neighboring tree.

"There is some one," thought he, turning pale.

CHAPTER LX.

WHAT M. DE MONSOREAU CAME TO ANNOUNCE.

As M. de Monsoreau approached, he remarked the dilapidation of the wall; it was almost in steps, and the brambles had been torn away and were lying about. He looked at the horse standing there. The animal had a saddle-cloth embroidered in silver, and in one corner an F. and an A. There was no doubt, then, that it came from the prince's stables; the letters stood for Francois d'Anjou. The count's suspicions at this sight became real alarm; the duke had come here, and had come often, for, besides the horse waiting there, there was a second that knew the way. He tied up his horse near to the other, and began to scale the wall. It was an easy task; there were places for both feet and hands, and the branches of an oak-tree, which hung over, had been carefully cut away. Once up, he saw at the foot of a tree a blue mantilla and a black cloak, and not far off a man and woman, walking hand in hand, with their backs turned to the wall, and nearly hidden by the trees. Unluckily, with M. de Monsoreau's weight a stone fell from the wall on the crackling branches with a great noise.

At this noise the lovers must have turned and seen him, for the cry of a woman was heard, and a rustling of the branches as they ran away like startled deer. At this cry, Monsoreau felt cold drops on his forehead, for he recognized Diana's voice. Full of fury, he jumped over the wall, and with his drawn sword in his hand, tried to follow the fugitives, but they had disappeared, and there was not a trace or a sound to guide him. He stopped, and considered that he was too much under the influence of passion to act with prudence against so powerful a rival. Then a sublime idea occurred to him; it was to climb back again over the wall, and carry off with his own the horse he had seen there. He retraced his steps to the wall and climbed up again; but on the other side no horse was to be seen; his idea was so good, that before it came to him it had come to his adversary. He uttered a howl of rage, clenching his fists, but started off at once on foot. In two hours and a half, he arrived at the gates of the city, dying with hunger and fatigue, but determined to interrogate every sentinel, and find out by what gate a man had entered with two horses. The first sentinel he applied to said that, about two hours before, a horse without a rider had passed through the gate, and had taken the road to the palace; he feared some accident must have happened to his rider. Monsoreau ground his teeth with passion, and went on to the castle. There he found great life and gayety, windows lighted up, and animation everywhere. He went first to the stable, and found his horse in the stall he had taken him from; then, without changing his dress, he went to the dining-room. The prince and all his gentlemen were sitting round a table magnificently served and lighted. The duke, who had been told of his arrival, received him without surprise, and told him to sit down and sup with him.

"Monseigneur," replied he, "I am hungry, tired, and thirsty; but I will neither eat, drink, nor sit down till I have delivered my important message."

"You come from Paris?"

"Yes, in great haste."

"Well, speak."

Monsoreau advanced, with a smile on his lips and hatred in his heart, and said, "Monseigneur, your mother is advancing hastily to visit you."

The duke looked delighted. "It is well," said he; "M. de Monsoreau, I find you to-day, as ever, a faithful servant: let us continue our supper, gentlemen."

Monsoreau sat down with them, but gloomy and preoccupied. He still seemed to see the two figures among the trees, and to hear the cry of Diana.

"You are overcome with weariness," said the prince to him, "really, you had better go to bed."

"Yes," said Livarot, "or he will go to sleep in his chair."

"Pardon, monseigneur, I am tired out."

"Get tipsy," said Antragues; "there is nothing so good when you are tired. To your health, count!"

"You must give us some good hunts," said Ribeirac, "you know the country."

"You have horses and woods here," said Antragues.

"And a wife," added Livarot.

"We will hunt a boar, count," said the prince.

"Oh, yes, to-morrow!" cried the gentlemen.

"What do you say, Monsoreau?"

"I am always at your highness's orders, but I am too much fatigued to conduct a chase to-morrow; besides which, I must examine the woods."

"And we must leave him time to see his wife," cried the duke.

"Granted," cried the young men; "we give him twenty-four hours to do all he has to do."

"Yes, gentlemen, I promise to employ them well."

"Now go to bed," said the duke, and M. de Monsoreau bowed, and went out, very happy to escape.

CHAPTER LXI.

HOW THE KING LEARNED THE FLIGHT OF HIS BELOVED BROTHER, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

WHEN Monsoreau had retired, the repast continued, and was more gay and joyous than ever.

"Now, Livarot," said the duke, "finish the recital of your flight from Paris, which Monsoreau interrupted."

Livarot began again, but as our title of historian gives us the privilege of knowing better than Livarot himself what had passed, we will substitute our recital for that of the young man.

Toward the middle of the night Henri III. was awoke by an unaccustomed noise in the palace. It was oaths, blows on the wall, rapid steps in the galleries, and, amid all, these words continually sounding, "What will the king say?"

Henri sat up and called Chicot, who was asleep on the couch. Chicot opened one eye.

"Ah, you were wrong to call me, Henri," said he; "I was dreaming that you had a son."

"But listen."

"To what? You say enough follies to me by day, without breaking in on my nights."

"But do you not hear?"

"Oh, oh! I do hear cries."

"Do you hear, 'What will the king say?'"

"It is one of two things—either your dog Narcissus is ill, or the Huguenots are taking their revenge for St. Bartholomew."

"Help me to dress."

"If you will first help me to get up."

"What a misfortune!" sounded from the antechamber.

"Shall we arm ourselves?" said the king.

"We had better go first and see what is the matter." And almost immediately they went out by the secret door into the gallery. "I begin to guess," said Chicot; "your unlucky prisoner has hanged himself."

"Oh, no; it cannot be that."

"So much the worse."

"Come on;" and they entered the duke's chamber.

The window was open, and the ladder still hung from it. Henry grew as pale as death.

"Oh, my son, you are not so blase as I thought!" said Chicot.

"Escaped!" cried Henri, in such a thundering voice that all the gentlemen who were crowded round the window turned in terror. Schomberg tore his hair, Quelus and Maugiron struck themselves like madmen; as for D'Epernon, he had vanished. This sight calmed the king.

"Gently, my son," said he, laying hold of Maugiron.

"No! mordieu!" cried he, "I will kill myself!" and he knocked his head against the wall.

"Hola! help me to hold him."

"It would be an easier death to pass

your sword through your body!" said Chicot.

"Quelus, my child," said the king, "you will be as blue as Schomberg when he came out of the indigo."

Quelus stopped, but Schomberg still continued to tear at his hair.

"Schomberg, Schomberg, a little reason, I beg."

"It is enough to drive one mad!"

"Indeed, it is a dreadful misfortune; there will be a civil war in my kingdom. Who did it—who furnished the ladder? Mordieu! I will hang all the city! Who was it? Ten thousand crowns to whoever will tell me his name, and one hundred thousand to whoever will bring him to me, dead or alive!"

"It must have been some Angevin," said Maugiron.

"Oh, yes! we will kill all the Angevins!" cried Quelus.

However, the king suddenly disappeared; he had thought of his mother, and, without saying a word, went to her. When he entered, she was half lying in a great armchair. She heard the news without answering.

"You say nothing, mother. Does not this flight seem to you criminal, and worthy of punishment?"

"My dear son, liberty is worth as much as a crown; and remember, I advised you to fly in order to gain a crown."

"My mother, he braves me—he outrages me!"

"No; he only saves himself."

"Ah! this is how you take my part."

"What do you mean, my son?"

"I mean that with age the feelings grow calm—that you do not love me as much as you used to do."

"You are wrong, my son," said Catherine coldly; "you are my beloved son, but he of whom you complain is also my son."

"Well, then, madame, I will go to find other counselors capable of feeling for me and of aiding me."

"Go, my son; and may God guide your counselors, for they will have need of it to aid you in this strait."

"Adieu, then, madame!"

"Adieu, Henri! I do not pretend to counsel you—you do not need me, I know—but beg your counselors to reflect well before they advise, and still more before they execute."

"Yes, madame, for the position is difficult."

"Very grave," replied she, raising her eyes to heaven.

"Have you any idea who it was that carried him off?"

Catherine did not reply.

"I think it was the Angevins," continued the king.

Catherine smiled scornfully.

"The Angevins!"

"You do not think so?"

"Do you, really?"

"Tell me what you think, madame."

"Why should I?"

"To enlighten me."

"Enlighten you! I am but a doting old woman, whose only influence lies in her prayers and repentance."

"No, mother; speak, you are the cleverest of us all."

"Useless; I have only ideas of the last century; at my age it is impossible I should give good counsel."

"Well, then, mother, refuse me your counsel, deprive me of your aid. In an hour I will hang all the Angevins in Paris."

"Hang all the Angevins!" cried Catherine, in amazement.

"Yes, hang, slay, massacre, burn; already, perhaps, my friends are out to begin the work."

"They will ruin themselves, and you with them."

"How so?"

"Blind! Will kings eternally have eyes, and not see?"

"Kings must avenge their injuries, it is but justice, and in this case all my subjects will rise to defend me."

"You are mad."——"Why so?"

"You will make oceans of blood flow. The standard of revolt will soon be raised; and you will arm against you a host who never would rise for Francois."

"But if I do not revenge myself they will think I am afraid."

"Did any one ever think I was afraid? Besides, it was not the Angevins."

"Who was it then? it must have been my brother's friends."

"Your brother has no friends."

"But who was it then?"

"Your enemy."

"What enemy?"

"O! my son, you know you have never had but one; yours, mine, your brother Charles's; always the same."

"Henri of Navarre, you mean?"

"Yes, Henri of Navarre."

"He is not at Paris."

"Do you know who is at Paris, and who is not? No, you are all deaf and blind."

"Can it have been he?"

"My son, at every disappointment you meet with, at every misfortune that happens to you of which the author is unknown, do not seek or conjecture; it is useless. Cry out, it is Henri of Navarre, and you will be sure to be right. Strike on the side where he is, and you will be sure to strike right. Oh! that man, that man; he is the sword suspended over the head of the Valois."

"Then you think I should countermand my orders about the Angevins?"

"At once, without losing an instant. Hasten; perhaps you are already too late."

Henry flew out of the Louvre to find his friends, but found only Chicot drawing figures in the sand with a stone.

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW, AS CHICOT AND THE QUEEN-MOTHER WERE AGREED, THE KING BEGAN TO AGREE WITH THEM.

"Is this how you defend your king?" cried Henri.

"Yes, it is my manner, and I think it is a good one."

"Good, indeed!"

"I maintain it, and I will prove it."

"I am curious to hear this proof."

"It is easy; but first, we have committed a great folly."

"How so?" cried Henri, struck by the agreement between Chicot and his mother.

"Yes," replied Chicot, "your friends are crying through the city, 'Death to the Angevins!' and now that I reflect, it was never proved that they had anything to do with the affair. And your friends, crying thus through the city, will raise that nice little civil war of which MM. de Guise have so much need, and which they did not succeed in raising for themselves. Besides which, your friends may get killed, which would not displease me, I confess, but which would afflict you, or else they will chase all the Angevins from the city, which will please M. d'Anjou enormously."

"Do you think things are so bad?"

"Yes, if not worse."

"But all this does not explain what you do here, sitting on a stone."

"I am tracing a plan of all the provinces that your brother will raise against you, and the number of men each will furnish to the revolt."

"Chicot, Chicot, you are a bird of bad augury."

"The owl sings at night, my son, it is his hour. Now it is dark, Henri, so dark that one might take the day for the night, and I sing what you ought to hear. Look!"

"At what?"

"My geographical plan. Here is Anjou, something like a tartlet, you see; there your brother will take refuge. Anjou, well managed, as Monsoreau and Bussy will manage it, will alone furnish to your brother ten thousand combatants."

"Do you think so?"

"That is the minimum; let us pass to Guyenne; here it is, this figure like a calf walking on one leg. Of course, you will not be astonished to find discontent in Guyenne; it is an old focus for revolt, and will be enchanted to rise. They can furnish 8,000 soldiers; that is not much, but they are well trained. Then we have Béarn and Navarre; you see these two compartments, which look like an ape on the back of an elephant—they may furnish about 16,000. Let us count now—10,000 for Anjou, 8,000 for Guyenne, 16,000 for Béarn and Navarre; making a total of 34,000."

"You think, then, that the king of Navarre will join my brother?"

"I should think so."

"Do you believe that he had anything to do with my brother's escape?"

Chicot looked at him. "That is not your own idea, Henri."—"Why not?"

"It is too clever, my son."

"Never mind whose idea it was; answer my question."

"Well! I heard a 'Ventre St. Gris' in the Rue de la Ferronnerie."

"You heard a 'Ventre St. Gris!' But t might not have been he."

"I saw him."

"You saw Henri of Navarre in Paris?"

"Yes."

"You saw my mortal enemy here, and did not tell me?"

"I am not a spy. Then there are the Guises; 20,000 or 25,000 men under the orders of the Duc de Guise will make up altogether a nice little army."

"But Henri of Navarre and the Duc de Guise are enemies."

"Which will not prevent them from uniting against you; they will be free to fight with each other when they have conquered you."

"You are right, Chicot, and my mother is right. I will call the Swiss."

"Oh, yes! Quelus has got them."

"My guards, then."

"Schomberg has them."

"My household at least."

"They have gone with Maugiron."

"Without my orders?"

"And when do you ever give orders, except, perhaps, to flagellate either your own skin, or that of others?—But about government.—Bah! allow me to observe that you have been a long time finding out that you rank seventh or eighth in this kingdom."

"Here they are!" cried the king, as three cavaliers approached, followed by a crowd of men on foot and on horseback.

"Schomberg! Quelus! come here," cried the king. They approached.

"I have been seeking you, and waiting for you impatiently. What have you done? Do not go away again without my permission."

"There is no more need," said Maugiron, who now approached, "since all is finished."

"All is finished?"

"Heaven be praised," said D'Epernon, appearing all at once, no one knew from whence.

"Then you have killed them?" cried the king; "well, at least the dead do not return."

"Oh! we had not that trouble; the cowards ran away, we had scarcely time to cross our swords with them."

Henri grew pale. "With whom?" said he.

"With Antragues?"

"On the contrary, he killed a lackey of Quelus's."

"Oh!" murmured the king, "here is a civil war lighted up."

Quelus started. "It is true," said he.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "you begin to perceive it, do you?"

"But, M. Chicot, you cried with us, 'Death to the Angevins!'"

"Oh! that is a different thing; I am a fool, and you are clever men."

"Come, peace, gentlemen; we shall have enough of war soon."

"What are your majesty's orders?"

"That you employ the same ardor in calming the people as you have done in exciting them, and that you bring back all the Swiss, my guards, and my household, and have the doors of the Louvre closed, so that perhaps to-morrow the bourgeois may take the whole thing for a sortie of drunken people."

The young men went off, and Henri returned to his mother.

"Well," said she, "what has passed?"

"All you foresaw, mother."

"They have escaped?"

"Alas! yes."

"What else?"

"Is not that enough?"

"The city?"

"Is in tumult; but that is not what disquiets me."

"No, it is the provinces."

"Which will revolt."

"What shall you do?"

"I see but one thing."

"What is that?"

"To withdraw the army from La Charite, and march on Anjou."

"And M. de Guise?"

"Oh, I will arrest him if necessary."

"And you think violent measures will succeed?"

"What can I do, then?"

"Your plan will not do."

"Well, what is your idea?"

"Send an ambassador."

"To whom?"

"To your brother."

"An ambassador to that traitor! You humiliate me, mother."

"This is not a moment to be proud."

"An ambassador who will ask for peace?"

"Who will buy it if necessary."

"With what? mon Dieu!"

"If it were only to secure quietly, afterward, those who have gone to make war on you."

"I would give much for that."

"Well, then, the end is worth the means."

"I believe you are right, mother; but whom shall I send?"

"Seek among your friends."

"My mother, I do not know a single man to whom I could confide such a mission."

"Confide it to a woman, then."

"My mother, would you consent?"

"My son, I am very old, and very weak, and death will perhaps await me on my return; but I will make this journey so rapidly that your brother and his friends will not have had time to learn their own power."

"Oh, my good mother!" cried Henri, kissing her hands, "you are my support, my benefactress!"

"That means that I am still queen of France," murmured she.

CHAPTER LXIII.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT GRATITUDE WAS ONE OF ST. LUC'S VIRTUES.

THE next morning, M. de Monsoreau rose early, and descended into the courtyard of the palace. He entered the stable, where Roland was in his place.

"Are the horses of monseigneur taught to return to their stable alone?" asked he of the man who stood there.

"No, M. le Comte."

"But Roland did so yesterday."

"Oh, he is remarkably intelligent."

"Has he ever done it before?"

"No, monsieur; he is generally ridden by the Duc d'Anjou, who is a good rider, and never gets thrown."

"I was not thrown," replied the count, "for I also am a good rider; no, I tied him to a tree while I entered a house, and at my return he had disappeared. I thought he had been stolen, or that some passer-by had played a bad joke by carrying him away; that was why I asked how he returned to the stable."

"He returned alone, as monsieur said just now."

"It is strange. Monseigneur often rides this horse, you say?"

"Nearly every day."

"His highness returned late last night?"

"About an hour before you."

"And what horse did he ride? was it a bay with a white star on his forehead?"

"No, monsieur, he rode Isolin, which you see here."

"And in the prince's escort is there any one who rides such a horse as I describe?"

"I know of no one."

"Well," said Monsoreau, impatiently, "saddle me Roland."

"Roland?"

"Yes, are there any orders against it?"

"No; on the contrary, I was told to let you have any horse you please."

When Roland was saddled, Monsoreau said to the man, "What are your wages?"

"Twenty crowns, monsieur."

"Will you earn ten times that sum at once?"

"I ask no better. But how?"

"Find out who rode yesterday the horse I described."

"Ah, monsieur, what you ask is very difficult, there are so many gentlemen come here."

"Yes, but two hundred crowns are worth some trouble."

"Certainly, M. le Comte, and I will do my best to discover."

"That is right, and here are ten crowns to encourage you."

"Thanks, M. le Comte."

"Well, tell the prince I have gone to reconnoiter the wood for the chase."

As he spoke he heard steps behind him, and turned. "Ah, M. de Bussy!" he cried.

"Why, M. le Comte, who would have thought of seeing you here!"

"And you, who they said was so ill."

"So I am; my doctor orders absolute rest, and for a week I have not left the city. Ah! you are going to ride Roland; I sold him to the duke, who is very fond of him."

"Yes, he is an excellent animal; I rode him yesterday."

"Which makes you wish for him again to-day?"

"Yes."

"You were speaking of a chase."

"Yes, the prince wishes for one."

"Whereabouts is it to be?"

"Near Meridor. Will you come with me?"

"No, thank you, I do not feel well."

"Oh!" cried a voice from behind, "there is M. de Bussy out without permission."

"Ah! there is my doctor scolding. Adieu, comte."

Bussy went away, and Monsoreau jumped into the saddle.

"What is the matter?" said Remy; "you look so pale, I believe you are really ill."

"Do you know where he is going?"

"No."

"To Meridor."

"Well, did you hope he would not?"

"Mon Dieu! what will happen, after what he saw yesterday?"

"Madame de Monsoreau will deny everything."

"But he saw her."

"She will say he did not."

"She will never have the courage."

"Oh, M. de Bussy, is it possible you do not know women better than that!"

"Remy, I feel very ill."

"So I see. Go home, and I will prescribe for you."

"What?"

"A slice of fowl and ham, and some lobster."

"Oh, I am not hungry."

"The more reason I should order you to eat."

"Remy, I fear that that wretch will make a great scene at Meridor. I ought to have gone with him when he asked me."

"What for?"

"To sustain Diana."

"Oh, she will sustain herself. Besides, you ought not to be out; we agreed you were too ill."

"I could not help it, Remy, I was so unquiet."

Remy carried him off, and made him sit down to a good breakfast.

M. de Monsoreau wished to see if it were chance or habit that had led Roland to the park wall; therefore he left the bridle on his neck. Roland took precisely the same road as on the previous day, and before very long M. de Monsoreau found himself in the same spot as before. Only now the place was solitary, and no horse was there. The count climbed the wall again, but no one was to be seen; therefore, judging that it was useless to watch for people on their guard, he went on to the park gates. The baron, seeing his son-in-law coming over the drawbridge, advanced ceremoniously to meet him. Diana, seated under a magnificent sycamore, was reading poetry, while Gertrude was embroidering at her side. The count, seeing them, got off his horse, and approached them.

"Madame," said he, "will you grant me the favor of an interview?"

"Willingly, monsieur."

"What calm, or rather what perfidy!" thought the count.

"Do you do us the honor of remaining at the chateau?" asked the baron.

"Yes, monsieur, until to-morrow, at least."

The baron went away to give orders, and Diana reseated herself, while Monsoreau took Gertrude's chair, and, with a look sufficient to intimidate most people,

said: "Madame, who was in the park with you yesterday?"

"At what time?" said Diana, in a firm voice.

"At six."

"Where?"

"Near the copse."

"It must have been some one else, it was not I."

"It was you, madame."

"What do you know about it?"

"Tell me the man's name!" cried Monsoreau, furiously.

"What man?"

"The man who was walking with you."

"I cannot tell, if it was some other woman."

"It was you, I tell you."

"You are wrong, monsieur."

"How dare you deny it? I saw you."

"You, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame, myself. And there is no other lady here."

"You are wrong again; there is Jeanne de Brissac."

"Madame de St. Luc?"

"Yes, my friend."

"And M. de St. Luc?"

"Never leaves her; theirs was a love-match; you must have seen them."

"It was not them; it was you, with some man whom I do not know, but whom I will know, I swear. I heard your cry."

"When you are more reasonable, monsieur, I shall be ready to hear you; at present I will retire."

"No, madame, you shall stay."

"Monsieur, here are M. and Madame de St. Luc, I trust you will contain yourself."

Indeed, M. and Madame de St. Luc approached. She bowed to Monsoreau, and St. Luc gave him his hand; then, leaving his wife to Monsoreau, took Diana, and after a walk they returned, warned by the bell for dinner, which was early at Meridor, as the baron preserved the old customs. The conversation was general, and turned naturally on the Duc d'Anjon, and the movement his arrival had caused. Diana sat far from her husband, between St. Luc and the baron.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE PROJECT OF M. DE ST. LUC.

WHEN the repast was over, Monsoreau took St. Luc's arm and went out. "Do you know," said he, "that I am very happy to have found you here, for the solitude of Meridor frightened me."

"What, with your wife? As for me, with such a companion I should find a desert delightful."

"I do not say no, but still—"

"Still, what?"

"I am very glad to have met you here."

"Really, monsieur, you are very polite, for I cannot believe that you could possibly fear ennui with such a companion, and such a country."

"Bah! I pass half my life in the woods."

"The more reason for being fond of them, it seems to me. I know I shall be very sorry to leave them; unluckily, I fear I shall be forced to do so before long."

"Why so?"

"Oh! monsieur, when is man the arbiter of his own destiny? He is like the leaf of the tree, which the wind blows about. You are very fortunate."

"Fortunate; how?"

"To live among these splendid trees."

"Oh! I do not think I shall stay here long; I am not so fond of nature, and I fear these woods; I think they are not safe."

"Why? on account of their loneliness, do you mean?"

"No, not that, for I suppose you see friends here."

"Not a soul."

"Ah! really. How long is it since you had any visitor?"

"Not since I have been here."

"Not one gentleman from the court at Angers?"

"Not one."

"Impossible."

"It is true."

"Then I am wrong."

"Perfectly; but why is not the park safe, are there bears here?"

"Oh, no."

"Wolves?"

"No."

"Robbers?"

"Perhaps. Tell me, monsieur, Madame de St. Luc seemed to me very pretty; is she not?"

"Why, yes."

"Does she often walk in the park?"

"Often; she adores the woods, like myself."

"And do you accompany her?"

"Always."

"Nearly always?"

"What the devil are you driving at?"

"Oh; mon Dieu, nothing; or, at least, a trifle."

"I listen."

"They told me—"

"Well?"

"You will not be angry?"

"I never am so."

"Besides, between husbands, these confidences are right; they told me a man had been seen wandering in the park."

"A man."

"Yes."

"Who came for my wife?"

"Oh! I do not say that."

"You would be wrong not to tell me, my dear Monsoreau. Who saw him? pray tell me."

"Oh! to tell you the truth, I do not think it was for Madame de St. Luc that he came."

"For whom, then?"

"Ah! I fear it is for Diana."

"Oh! I should like that better."

"What?"

"Certainly; you know we husbands are an egotistical set. Every one for himself, and God for us all."

"The devil rather."

"Then you think a man entered here?"

"I think so."

"And I do more than think," said St. Luc, "for I saw him."

"You saw a man in the park?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Alone?"

"With Madame de Monsoreau."

"Where?"

"Just here to the left." And as they had walked down to the old copse, St. Luc pointed out the spot where Bussy always came over.

"Ah!" continued he, "here is a wall in a bad state; I must warn the baron."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"Of what?"

"Of climbing over here to talk to my wife."

St. Luc seemed to reflect.

"Diable!" said he, "it could only have been—"

"Whom?"

"Why, yourself."

"Are you joking, M. de St. Luc?"

"Ma foi, no; when I was first married I did such things."

"Come! you are trying to put me off; but do not fear, I have courage. Help me to seek, you will do me an immense favor."

St. Luc shook his head. "It must have been you," said he.

"Do not jest, I beg of you; the thing is serious."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Oh! and how does this man come?"

"Secretly."——"Often?"

"I fear so; look at the marks in the wall."

"Well, I suspected it, but I always fancied it was you."

"But I tell you, no!"

"Oh, I believe you, my dear sir."

"Well, then—"

"It must have been some one else."

Monsoreau began to look black, but St. Luc preserved his easy nonchalance.

"I have an idea," said he.

"Tell me."

"If it were—"

"Well!"

"But, no."

"Pray speak."

"The Duc d'Anjou."

"I thought so at first, but I have made inquiries, and it could not have been he."

"Oh! he is very cunning."

"Yes, but it was not he."

"Wait, then."

"Well!"

"I have another idea; if it was neither you nor the duke, it must have been I."

"HE PUT HIS LEG OVER THE BALUSTRADE AND PLACED HIS FOOT ON THE FIRST STEP."—*Page 377.*

"You?"

"Why not?"

"You to come on horseback to the outside of the park, when you live inside!"

"Oh, mon Dieu! I am such a capricious being."

"You, who fled away when you saw me!"

"Oh! any one would do that."

"Then you were doing wrong," cried the count, no longer able to keep in his anger.

"I do not say so."

"You are mocking me," cried the count, growing very pale, "and have been doing so for a quarter of an hour."

"You are wrong, monsieur," said St. Luc, drawing out his watch and looking steadily at him; "it has been twenty minutes."——"You insult me."

"And you insult me with your questions like a constable."

"Ah! now I see clearly."

"How wonderful, at ten o'clock in the morning. But what do you see?"

"I see that you act in concert with the traitor, the coward, whom I saw yesterday."

"I should think so; he is my friend."

"Then I will kill you in his place."

"Bah! in your own house, and without crying, Gare. Ah! M. de Monsoreau, how badly you have been brought up, and how living among beasts spoils the manners."

"Do you not see that I am furious?" howled the count.

"Yes, indeed, I do see it, and it does not become you at all; you look frightful."

The count drew his sword.

"Ah!" said St. Luc, "you try to provoke me; you see I am perfectly calm."

"Yes, I do provoke you."

"Take the trouble to get over the wall; on the other side we shall be on neutral ground."

"What do I care!"

"I do; I do not want to kill you in your own house."

"Very well!" said Monsoreau, climbing over.

"Take care; pray do not hurt yourself, my dear count; those stones are loose," said St. Luc. Then he also got over.

CHAPTER LXV.

HOW M. DE ST. LUC SHOWED M. DE MONSOREAU THE THRUST THAT THE KING HAD TAUGHT HIM.

"ARE you ready?" cried Monsoreau.

"No; I have the sun in my eyes."

"Move, then; I warn you I shall kill you."

"Shall you really? Well, man proposes, and God disposes. Look at that bed of poppies and dandelions."

"Well!"

"Well, I mean to lay you there." And he laughed as he drew his sword. Monsoreau began the combat furiously, but St. Luc parried his thrusts skillfully.

"Pardieu! M. de Monsoreau," said he, "you use your sword very well; you might kill any one but Bussy or me."

Monsoreau grew pale.

"As for me," continued St. Luc, "the king, who loves me, took the trouble to give me a great many lessons, and showed me, among other things, a thrust, which you shall see presently. I tell you, that you may have the pleasure of knowing you are killed by the king's method; it is very flattering." And then suddenly he rushed furiously on Monsoreau, who, half wild with rage as he was, parried five thrusts, but received the sixth full in his chest.

"Ah!" said St. Luc, "you will fall just where I told you," as Monsoreau sank down on the poppies. Then, wiping his sword, he stood quietly by, watching the changes which came over the face of the dying man.

"Ah, you have killed me!" cried Monsoreau.

"I intended to do so, but now I see you dying, devil take me if I am not sorry for what I have done. You are horribly jealous, it is true, but you were brave. Have you any last wish? If so, tell it to me; and, on the faith of a gentleman, it shall be executed. Are you thirsty? Shall I get you water?"

Monsoreau did not reply. He turned over with his face to the earth, biting the ground and struggling in his blood. Then he tried to raise his head, but fell back with a groan.

"Come, he is dead; let me think no more about him. Ah! but that is not so easy, when you have killed a man." And jumping back over the wall, he went to the chateau. The first person he saw was Diana talking to his wife.

"How well she will look in black," thought he. Then, approaching them, "Pardon me," said he, "but may I say a few words to Jeanne?"

"Do so; I will go to my father."

"What is it?" said Jeanne, when Diana was gone; "you look rather gloomy."

"Why, yes."

"What has happened?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! an accident."

"To you?"

"Not precisely to me, but to a person who was near me."

"Who was it?"

"The person I was walking with."

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Alas! yes; poor dear man."

"What has happened to him?"

"I believe he is dead."

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, starting back in horror.

"Just so."

"He who was here just now talking—"

"Yes, that is just the cause of his death; he talked too much."

"St. Luc, you are hiding something from me!" cried Jeanne, seizing his hands.

"I! Nothing; not even the place where he lies."

"Where is it?"

"Down there behind the wall; just where Bussy used to tie his horse."

"It was you who killed him."

"Parbleu! that is not very difficult to discover."

"Unlucky that you are!"

"Ah, dear friend! he provoked me, insulted me, drew the sword first."

"It is dreadful! the poor man!"

"Good; I was sure of it; before a week is over he will be called St. Monsoreau."

"But you cannot stay here in the house of the man you have killed."

"So I thought at once, and that is why I came to ask you to get ready."

"He has not wounded you?"

"No, I am perfectly unhurt."

"Then we will go."

"As quickly as possible, for you know the accident may be discovered at any moment."

"Then Diana is a widow."

"That is just what I thought of."

"After you killed him?"

"No, before."

"Well, I will go and tell her."

"Spare her feelings."

"Do not laugh. Meanwhile you get the horses saddled. But where shall we go?"

"To Paris."

"But the king?"

"Oh! he will have forgotten everything by this time; besides, if there is to be war, as seems probable, he will be glad of me. But I must have pen and ink."

"For what?"

"To write to Bussy; I cannot leave Anjou without telling him why."

"No, of course not; you will find all that you require in my room." St. Luc went in, and wrote:

"DEAR FRIEND — You will learn, by report, ere long, the accident which has happened to M. de Monsoreau; we had together, by the old copse, a discussion on broken-down walls and horses that go home alone. In the heat of the argument, he fell on a bed of poppies and dandelions so hard that he died there.

"Your friend for life, ST. LUC.

"P. S.—As you may think this rather improbable, I must add that we had our swords in our hands. I set off at once for Paris to make peace with the king, Anjou not seeming to me very safe after what has occurred."

Ten minutes after a servant set off for Angers with this letter, while M. and Madame de St. Luc went out by another door, leaving Diana much grieved at their departure, and much embarrassed how to tell the baron what had occurred. She had turned away her eyes from St. Luc as he passed.

"That is the reward for serving your friends," said he to his wife; "decidedly all people are ungrateful excepting me."

CHAPTER LXVI.

IN WHICH WE SEE THE QUEEN-MOTHER ENTER THE TOWN OF ANGERS, BUT NOT TRIUMPHANTLY.

At the same time that M. de Monsoreau fell under the sword of St. Luc, a flourish of trumpets sounded at the closed gates of Angers. It was Catherine de Medicis, who arrived there with rather a large suite. They sent to tell Bussy, who rose from his bed, and went to the prince, who immediately got into his. Certainly the airs played by the trumpets were fine, but they had not the virtue of those which made the walls of Jericho fall, for the gates did not open. Catherine leaned out of her litter to show herself to the guards, hoping the sight of her would do more than the sound of the trumpets. They saw her, and saluted her courteously, but did not open the gates. Then she sent a gentleman to demand admittance, but they replied that Angers being in a state of war, the gates could not be opened without some necessary formalities. Catherine was furious. At last Bussy appeared, with five other gentlemen.

"Who is there?" cried he.

"It is her majesty the queen-mother, who has come to visit Angers."

"Very well, go to the left, and about eighty steps off you will find the postern."

"A postern for her majesty!" cried the gentleman.

But Bussy was no longer there to hear, he and his friends had ridden off toward the indicated spot.

"Did your majesty hear?" asked the gentleman.

"Oh! yes, monsieur, I heard; let us go there, if that be the only way to get in."

The cortège turned to the left, and the postern opened.

"Your majesty is welcome to Angers," said Bussy.

"Thank you, M. de Bussy," said the queen, descending from her litter, and advancing toward the little door. Bussy stopped her. "Take care, madame," said he, "the door is low, and you will hurt yourself."

"Must I then stoop?" replied she; "it is the first time I ever entered a city so."

Once through the gate she re-entered her litter to go to the palace, Bussy and his friends escorting her.

"Where is my son?" cried she; "why do I not see M. d'Anjou?"

"Monseigneur is ill, madame, or else your majesty cannot doubt that he would have come himself to do the honors of *his* city."

Catherine was sublime in hypocrisy.

"Ill—my poor child, ill!" cried she; "ah! let us hasten to him; is he well taken care of?"

"Yes, madame, we do our best."

"Does he suffer?"

"Horribly, he is subject to these sudden indispositions."

"It was sudden, then?"

"Mon Dieu! yes, madame."

When they arrived at the palace, Bussy ran up first to the duke.

"Here she is!" cried he.

"Is she furious?"

"Exasperated."

"Does she complain?"

"No, she does worse, she smiles."

"What do the people say?"

"They looked at her in mute terror; now, monseigneur, be careful."

"We stick to war?"

"Pardieu, ask one hundred to get ten, and with her you will only get five."

"Bah! you think me very weak. Are you all here? Where is Monsoreau?"

"I believe he is at Meridor."

"Her majesty the queen-mother!" cried the usher at the door.

Catherine entered, looking pale. The duke made a movement to rise, but she threw herself into his arms and half stifled him with kisses. She did more—she wept.

"We must take care," said Antragues to Ribeirac, "each tear will be paid for by blood."

Catherine now sat down on the foot of the bed. At a sign from Bussy every one went away but himself.

"Will you not go and look after my poor attendants, M. de Bussy? you who are at home here," said the queen.

It was impossible not to go, so he replied, "I am happy to please your majesty," and he also retired.

Catherine wished to discover whether her son were really ill or feigning. But he, worthy son of such a mother, played his part to perfection. She had wept, he had a fever. Catherine, deceived, thought him really ill, and hoped to have more influence over a mind weakened by suffering. She overwhelmed him with tenderness, embraced him, and wept so much that at last he asked her the reason.

"You have run so great a risk," replied she.

"In escaping from the Louvre, mother?"

"No, after."

"How so?"

"Those who aided you in this unlucky escape—"

"Well?"

"Were your most cruel enemies."

"She wishes to find out who it was," thought he.

"The king of Navarre," continued she, "the eternal scourge of our race—"

"Ah! she knows."

"He boasts of having gained much by it."

"That is impossible, for he had nothing to do with it; and if he had, I am quite safe, as you see. I have not seen the king of Navarre for two years."

"It was not only of danger I spoke!"

"Of what, then?" replied the duke, smiling, as he saw the tapestry shake behind the queen.

"The king's anger," said she, in a solemn voice; "the furious anger which menaces you—"

"This danger is something like the other, madame; he may be furious, but I am safe here."

"You believe so?"

"I am sure of it; your majesty has announced it to me yourself."

"How so?"

"Because if you had been charged only with menaces, you would not have come, and the king in that case would have hesitated to place such a hostage in my hands."

"A hostage! I!" cried she, terrified.

"A most sacred and venerable one," replied the duke, with a triumphant glance at the wall.

Catherine was baffled, but she did not know that Bussy was encouraging the duke by signs.

"My son," said she at length, "you are quite right; they are words of peace I bring to you."

"I listen, mother, and I think we shall now begin to understand each other."

CHAPTER LXVII.

LITTLE CAUSES AND GREAT EFFECTS.

CATHERINE had, as we have seen, had the worst of the argument. She was surprised, and began to wonder if her son were really as decided as he appeared to be, when a slight event changed the aspect of affairs. Bussy had been, as we said, encouraging the prince secretly at every word that he thought dangerous to his cause. Now his cause was war at any price, for he wished to stay in Anjou, watch M. de Monsoreau, and visit his wife. The duke feared Bussy, and was guided by him. Suddenly, however, Bussy felt himself pulled by his cloak; he turned and saw Remy, who drew him gently toward him.

"What is it, Remy?" said he impatiently. "Why disturb me at such a moment?"

"A letter."

"And for a letter you take me from this important conversation."

"It is from Meridor."

"Oh! thank you, my good Remy."

"Then I was not wrong?"

"Oh, no; where is it?"

"That is what made me think it of importance; the messenger would only give it to you yourself."

"Is he here?"

"Yes."

"Bring him in."

Remy opened the door, and a servant entered.

"Here is M. de Bussy," said Remy.

"Oh, I know him well," said the man, giving the letter.

"Did she give it to you?"

"No; M. de St. Luc."

As Bussy read, he grew first pale, then crimson.

Remy dismissed the servant, and Bussy,

with a bewildered look, held out the letter to him.

"See," said he, "what St. Luc has done for me."

"Well," said Remy, "this appears to me to be very good; and St. Luc is a gallant fellow."

"It is incredible!" cried Bussy.

"Certainly; but that is nothing. Here is our position quite changed; I shall have a Comtesse de Bussy for a patient."

"Yes, she shall be my wife. So he is dead."

"So, you see, it is written."

"Oh, it seems like a dream, Remy. What! shall I see no more that specter, always coming between me and happiness? It cannot be true."

"It is true; read again, 'he died there.'"

"But Diana cannot stay at Meridor—I do not wish it; she must go where she will forget him."

"Paris will be best; people soon forget at Paris."

"You are right; we will return to the little house in the Rue des Tournelles, and she shall pass there her months of widowhood in obscurity."

"But to go to Paris you must have—"

"What?"

"Peace in Anjou."

"True; oh, mon Dieu! what time lost."

"That means that you are going at once to Meridor."

"No, not I, but you; I must stay here; besides, she might not like my presence just now."

"How shall I see her? Shall I go to the castle?"

"No; go first to the old copse and see if she is there; if she is not, then go to the castle."

"What shall I say to her?"

"Say that I am half mad." And pressing the young man's hand, he returned to his place behind the tapestry.

Catherine had been trying to regain her ground.

"My son," she had said, "it seemed to me that a mother and son could not fail to understand each other."

"Yet you see that happens sometimes."

"Never when she wishes it."

"When they wish it, you mean," said the duke, seeking a sign of approbation from Bussy for his boldness.

"But I wish it, my son, and am willing to make any sacrifices to attain peace."

"Oh!"

"Yes, my dear child. What do you ask?—what do you demand? Speak."

"Oh, my mother!" said Francois, almost embarrassed at his own easy victory.

"Listen, my son. You do not wish to drown the kingdom in blood—it is not possible; you are neither a bad Frenchman nor a bad brother."

"My brother insulted me, madame, and I owe him nothing, either as brother or king."

"But I, Francois—you cannot complain of me?"

"Yes, madame, you abandoned me."

"Ah! you wish to kill me. Well, a mother does not care to live to see her children murder each other!" cried Catherine, who wished very much to live.

"Oh, do not say that, madame, you tear my heart!" cried Francois, whose heart was not torn at all.

Catherine burst into tears. The duke took her hands, and tried to reassure her, not without uneasy glances toward the tapestry.

"But what do you want or ask for, mother? I will listen," said he.

"I wish you to return to Paris, dear child, to return to your brother's court, who will receive you with open arms."

"No, madame, it is not he whose arms are open to receive me—it is the Bastille."

"No; return, and on my honor, on my love as a mother, I solemnly swear that you shall be received by the king as though you were king and he the Duc d'Anjou."

The duke looked to the tapestry.

"Accept, my son; you will have honors, guards."

"Oh, madame, your son gave me guards—his four minions!"

"Do not reply so; you shall choose your own guards, and M. de Bussy shall be their captain, if you like."

Again the duke glanced to the wall, and, to his surprise, saw Bussy smiling and applauding by every possible method.

"What is the meaning of this change?" thought the duke; "is it that he may be captain of my guards? Then must I accept?" said he aloud, as though talking to himself.

"Yes, yes!" signed Bussy, more decidedly than ever.

"Doubtless, dear child," said Catherine, "it is not disagreeable to return to Paris."

"Well, I will reflect," said the duke, who wished to consult with Bussy.

"I have won," thought Catherine.

They embraced once more, and separated.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

HOW M. DE MONSOREAU OPENED AND SHUT HIS EYES, WHICH PROVED THAT HE WAS NOT DEAD.

RENY rode along, wondering in what humor he should find Diana, and what he should say to her. He had just arrived at the park wall, when his horse, which had been trotting, stopped so suddenly that, had he not been a good rider, he would have been thrown over his head. Remy, astonished, looked to see the cause, and saw before him a pool of blood, and a little further on, a body, lying against the wall. "It is Monsoreau!" cried he; "how strange! he lies dead there, and the blood is down here. Ah! there is the track; he must have crawled there, or rather that good M. de St. Luc leaned him up against the wall that the blood might not fly to his head. He died with his eyes open, too."

All at once Remy started back in horror; the two eyes, that he had seen open, shut again, and a paleness more livid than ever spread itself over the face of the defunct. Remy became almost as pale as M. de Monsoreau, but, as he was a doctor, he quickly recovered his presence of mind, and said to himself that if Monsoreau moved his eyes, it showed he was not dead. "And yet I have read," thought he, "of strange movements after death." This devil of a fellow frightens one even after death. Yes, his eyes are quite closed; there is one method of ascertaining whether he is dead or not, and that is to shove my sword into him, and if he does not move, he is certainly dead." And Remy was preparing for this charitable action, when suddenly the eyes opened again. Remy started back, and the perspiration rolled off his forehead as he murmured, "He is not dead; we are in a nice position. Yes, but if I kill him he will be dead." And he looked at Monsoreau, who seemed also to be looking at him earnestly.

"Oh!" cried Remy, "I cannot do it. God knows that if he were upright before me I would kill him with all my heart; but as he is now, helpless and three parts dead, it would be an infamy."

"Help!" murmured Monsoreau, "I am dying."

"Mordieu!" thought Remy, "my position is embarrassing. I am a doctor, and, as such, bound to succor my fellow-creatures when they suffer. It is true that Monsoreau is so ugly that he can scarcely be called a fellow-creature, still he is a man. Come, I must forget that I am the friend of M. de Bussy, and do my duty as a doctor."

"Help!" repeated the wounded man.

"Here I am," said Remy.

"Fetch me a priest and a doctor."

"The doctor is here, and perhaps he will dispense with the priest."

"Remy," said Monsoreau, "by what chance—"

Remy understood all the question might mean. This was no beaten road, and no one was likely to come without particular businsss.

"Pardieu!" he replied, "a mile or two off I met M. de St. Luc—"

"Ah! my murderer."

"And he said, 'Remy, go to the old copse, there you will find a man dead.'"

"Dead?"

"Yes, he thought so; well, I came here and saw you."

"And now, tell me frankly, am I mortally wounded?"

"I will try to find out."

Remy approached him carefully, took

off his cloak, his doublet and shirt. The sword had penetrated between the sixth and seventh ribs.

"Do you suffer much?"

"In my back, not in my chest."

"Ah, let me see; where?"

"Below the shoulder bone."

"The steel must have come against a bone." And he began to examine. "No, I am wrong," said he, "the sword came against nothing, but passed right through." Monsoreau fainted after this examination.

"Ah! that is all right," said Remy, "syncope, low pulse, cold in the hands and legs: Diable! the widowhood of Madame de Monsoreau will not last long, I fear."

At this moment a slight bloody foam rose to the lips of the wounded man.

Remy drew from his pocket his lancet case; then tearing off a strip from the patient's shirt, bound it round his arm.

"We shall see," said he, "if the blood flows. Ah, it does! and I believe that Madame de Monsoreau will not be a widow. Pardon, my dear M. de Bussy, but I am a doctor."

Presently the patient breathed, and opened his eyes.

"Oh!" stammered he, "I thought all was over."

"Not yet, my dear monsieur; it is even possible—"——"That I live!"

"Oh, mon Dieu! yes; but let me close the wound. Stop; do not move; nature at this moment is aiding my work. I make the blood flow, and she stops it. Ah! nature is a great doctor, my dear sir. Let me wipe you lips. See, the bleeding has stopped already. Good; all goes well, or rather badly."

"Badly!"

"No, not for you; but I know what I mean."

"You think I shall get well?"

"Alas! yes."

"You are a singular doctor, M. Remy."

"Never mind, as long as I cure you," said he, rising.

"Do not abandon me," said the count.

"Ah! you talk too much. Diable! I out to tell him to cry out."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind; your wound is dressed. Now I will go to the castle and fetch assistance."

"And what must I do meanwhile?"

"Keep quite still; do not stir; breathe lightly, and try not to cough. Which is the nearest house?"

"The chateau de Meridor."

"Which is the way to it?" said Remy, affecting ignorance.

"Get over the wall, and you will find yourself in the park."

"Very well; I go."

"Thanks, generous man."

"Generous, indeed, if you only knew all."

He soon arrived at the chateau, where all the inhabitants were busy looking for the body of the count; for St. Luc had given them a wrong direction. Remy came among them like a thunderbolt, and was so eager to bring them to the rescue, that Diana looked at him with surprise.

"I thought he was Bussy's friend," murmured she, as Remy disappeared, carrying with him a wheel-barrow, lint and water.

CHAPTER LXIX.

HOW M. LE DUC D'ANJOU WENT TO MERIDOR TO CONGRATULATE MADAME DE MONSOREAU ON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND, AND FOUND HIM THERE BEFORE HIM.

As soon as the duke left his mother, he hastened to Bussy, to know the meaning of all his signs. Bussy, who was reading St. Luc's letter for the fifth time, received the prince with a gracious smile.

"How! monseigneur takes the trouble to come to my house to seek me."

"Yes, mordieu, I want an explanation."

"From me?"

"Yes, from you."

"I listen, monseigneur."

"You tell me to steel myself against the suggestions of my mother, and to sustain the attack valiantly. I do so: and in the hottest of the fight you tell me to surrender."

"I gave you all those charges, mon-

seigneur, because I was ignorant of the object for which your mother came; but now that I see that she has come to promote your highness's honor and glory—"

"How! what do you mean?"

"Doubtless: what does your highness want? To triumph over your enemies, do you not? For I do not believe, as some people say, that you wish to become king of France."

The duke looked sullen.

"Some might counsel you to it, but believe me, they are your most cruel enemies. Consider for yourself, monseigneur; have you one hundred thousand men—ten millions of livres—alliances with foreigners — and, above all, would you turn against your king?"

"My king did not hesitate to turn against me."

"Ah! there you are right. Well! declare yourself — get crowned — take the title of king of France—and if you succeed, I ask no better; I should grow great with you."

"Who speaks of being king?" cried the duke, angrily; "you discuss a question which I have never proposed, even to myself."

"Well, then, that is settled. Let them give you a guard and five hundred thousand livres. Obtain, before peace is signed, a subsidy from Anjou, to carry on the war. Once you have it, you can keep it. So, we should have arms and money, and we could do—God knows what."

"But once they have me at Paris, they will laugh at me."

"Oh! impossible, monseigneur; did you not hear what the queen-mother offered you?"

"She offered me many things."

"That disquiets you?"

"Yes."

"But, among other things, she offered you a company of guards, even if I commanded it."

"Yes, she offered that."

"Well, accept: I will be captain; Antragues and Livarot lieutenants; and Ribeirac ensign. Let us get up your company for you, and see if they dare to laugh at you then."

"Ma foi! I believe you are right, Bussy; I will think of it."

"Do so, monseigneur."

"What were you reading so attentively when I came in?"

"Oh! a letter, which interests you still more than me. Where the devil were my brains, that I did not show it to you?"

"What is it?"

"Sad news, monseigneur; Monsoreau is dead."

"What!" cried the duke, with a surprise which Bussy thought was a joyful one.

"Dead, monseigneur."

"M. de Monsoreau!"

"Mon Dieu! yes; are we not all mortal?"

"Yes; but so suddenly."

"Ah! but if you are killed?"

"Then, he was killed?"

"So it seems; and by St. Luc, with whom he quarreled."

"Oh, that dear St. Luc!"

"I did not think he was one of your highness's friends."

"Oh, he is my brother's, and, since we are to be reconciled, his friends are mine. But are you sure?"

"As sure as I can be. Here is a letter from St. Luc announcing it; and I have sent Remy, my doctor, to present my condolences to the old baron."

"Oh, Monsoreau!" cried the prince, with his malignant smile.

"Why, monseigneur, one would say you hated the poor count."

"No, it was you."

"Of course I did; did he not humiliate me through you?"

"You remember it still."

"But you, monseigneur, whose friend and tool he was—"

"Well, well, get my horse saddled, Bussy."——"What for?"

"To go to Meridor; I wish to pay a visit to Madame Monsoreau. I have been projecting one for some time, and I do not know why it has not taken place sooner."

"Now Monsoreau is dead," thought Bussy, "I do not care; I will protect Diana. I will go with him, and see her."

A quarter of an hour after, the prince.

Bussy, and ten gentlemen rode to Meridor, with that pleasure which fine weather, turf, and youth always inspire in men on horseback.

The porter at the chateau came to ask the names of the visitors.

"The Duc d'Anjou," replied the prince.

The porter blew his horn, and soon windows were opened, and they heard the noise of bolts and bars as the door was unfastened, and the old baron appeared on the threshold, holding in his hand a bunch of keys. Immediately behind him stood a lady.

"Ah, there is the beautiful Diana!" cried the duke; "do you see her, Bussy?"

Diana, indeed, came out of the house, and behind her came a litter, on which lay Monsoreau, his eyes shining with fever and jealousy as he was carried along.

"What does this mean?" cried the duke to his companion, who had turned whiter than the handkerchief with which he was trying to hide his emotion.

"Long live the Duc d'Anjou!" cried Monsoreau, raising his hand in the air by a violent effort.

"Take care, you will hurt yourself," said a voice behind him. It was Remy.

Surprise does not last long at court, so, with a smile, the duke said, "Oh, my dear count, what a happy surprise! Do you know we heard you were dead?"

"Come near, monseigneur, and let me kiss your hand. Thank God, not only I am not dead, but I shall live; I hope to serve you with more ardor than ever."

As for Bussy, he felt stunned, and scarcely dared to look at Diana. This treasure, twice lost to him, belonged still to his rival.

"And you, M. de Bussy," said Monsoreau, "receive my thanks, for it is almost to you that I owe my life."

"To me!" stammered the young man, who thought the count was mocking him.

"Yes, indirectly, it is true, for here is my savior," said he, turning to Remy, who would willingly have sunk into the earth. Then, in spite of his signs, which he took for precautions to himself, he recounted the care and skill which the young doctor had exhibited toward him.

The duke frowned, and Bussy looked thunders. The poor fellow raised his hands to heaven.

"I hear," continued the count, "that Remy one day found you dying, as he found me. It is a tie of friendship between us, M. de Bussy, and when Monsoreau loves, he loves well; it is true that when he hates, it is also with all his heart."

"Come, then," said the duke, getting off his horse, "deign, beautiful Diana, to do us the honors of the house, which we thought to find in grief, but which we find still the abode of joy. As for you, Monsoreau, rest—you require it."

"Monseigneur!" said the count, "it shall never be said that Monsoreau, while he lived, allowed another to do the honors of his house to you; my servants will carry me, and wherever you go, I shall follow."

Bussy approached Diana, and Monsoreau smiled; he took her hand, and he smiled again. It was only the duke he feared.

"Here is a great change, M. le Comte," said Diana.

"Alas! why is it not greater?"

CHAPTER LXX.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF LARGE LITTERS AND NARROW DOORS.

BUSSY did not quit Diana; the smiles of Monsoreau gave him a liberty which he was only too glad to make use of.

"Madame," said he to Diana, "I am in truth the most miserable of men. On the news of his death, I advised the prince to return to Paris, and to come to terms with his mother; he did so, and now you remain in Anjou."

"Oh, Louis," replied she, "we dare not say that we are unhappy; so many happy days, so many joys—do you forget them all?"

"I forget nothing, madame; on the contrary, I remember but too much, and that is why I suffer as I do at losing this happiness. What shall I do if I return to Paris, a hundred leagues from you? My heart sinks at the thought, Diana."

Diana looked at him, and saw so much

grief in his eyes, that she said, "Well, if you go to Paris, I will go also."

"How! will you quit M. de Monsoreau?"

"No, he would not allow me to do so; he must come with us."

"Wounded, ill as he is? Impossible!"

"He will come, I tell you." And, leaving Bussy, she went to the prince. The count frowned dreadfully.

"Monseigneur," said she, "they say your highness is fond of flowers; if you will come with me, I will show you the most beautiful in Anjou."

The duke offered her his hand.

"Where are you about to take monseigneur?" asked Monsoreau uneasily.

"Into the greenhouse."

"Ah! well, carry me there."

"Ma foi!" thought Remy, "I was right not to kill him, for he will soon kill himself."

Diana smiled on Bussy, and said to him, in a low voice, "Do not let M. de Monsoreau suspect that you are about to leave Anjou, and I will manage all."

"Good!" said Bussy, and approaching the prince, he whispered, "Do not let Monsoreau know that we intend to make peace."——"Why not?"

"Because he might tell the queen-mother, to make a friend of her."

"You suspect him, then?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, so do I; I believe he only counterfeited death to deceive us."

"No, he really received a sword-thrust through his body, and but for that fool of a Remy, he would have died; I believe his soul must be glued to his body."

They arrived at the conservatory, and Diana continued to smile charmingly on the prince. He passed first, then Diana, and Monsoreau wished to follow, but it was impossible. His litter was too large to go through the door. At this sight he uttered a groan. Diana went on quietly, without looking at him, but Bussy, who understood her, said to him:

"It is useless to try, M. le Comte, your litter will not pass."

"Monseigneur!" cried Monsoreau, "do not go into that conservatory, some of the flowers exhale dangerous perfumes."

Then he fainted, and was carried to his room.

"Bussy went to tell Diana what had happened, and she left the duke to go to the castle.

"Have we succeeded?" said Bussy to her as she passed.

"I hope so; do not go away without having seen Gertrude."

When Monsoreau opened his eyes again, he saw Diana standing at his bedside.

"Ah! it is you, madame," said he, "to-night we leave for Paris."

Remy cried out in horror, but Monsoreau paid no attention. "Can you think of such a thing, with your wound?" said Diana, quietly.

"Madame, I would rather die than suffer, and were I to die on the road, we start to-night."—"As you please, monsieur."

"Then make your preparations."

"My preparations are soon made, but may I ask the reason of this sudden determination?"

"I will tell you, madame, when you have no more flowers to show to the prince, and when my doors are large enough to admit litters."

Diana bowed.

"But, madame—" said Remy.

"M. le Comte wishes it," replied she, "and my duty is to obey." And she left the room.

As the duke was making his adieux to the Baron de Meridor, Gertrude appeared, and said aloud to the duke that her mistress regretted that she could not have the honor of saying farewell to his highness; and softly to Bussy that Diana would set off for Paris that evening. As they went home again, the duke felt unwilling to leave Anjou now that Diana smiled on him. Therefore he said, "I have been reflecting, Bussy," said he.

"On what, monseigneur?"

"That it is not wise to give in at once to my mother."

"You are right, she thinks herself clever enough without that."

"But by dragging it on for a week, and giving fetes, and calling the nobility around us, she will see how strong we are."

"Well reasoned, but still—"

"I will stay here a week; depend upon it I shall draw new concessions from the queen."

Bussy appeared to reflect. "Well, monseigneur," said he, "perhaps you are right, but the king, not knowing your intentions, may become annoyed; he is very irascible."

"You are right, but I shall send some one to the king to announce my return in a week."

"Yes, but that some one will run great risks."

"If I change my mind, you mean."

"Yes, and in spite of your promise, you would do so if you thought it your interest."

"Perhaps."

"Then they will send your messenger to the Bastille."

"I will give him a letter, and not let him know what he is carrying."

"On the contrary, give him no letter, and let him know."

"Then no one will go."

"Oh! I know some one."

"Who?"

"I, myself."

"You!"

"Yes, I like difficult negotiations."

"Bussy, my dear Bussy, if you will do that, I shall be eternally grateful."

Bussy smiled. The duke thought he hesitated.

"And I will give you ten thousand crowns for your journey," added he.

"Thanks, monseigneur, but these things cannot be paid for."

"Then you will go?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Whenever you like."

"The sooner the better."

"This evening if you wish it."

"Dear Bussy."

"You know I would do anything for your highness. I will go to-night; you stay here and enjoy yourself, and get me something good from the queen-mother."

"I will not forget."

Bussy then prepared to depart as soon as the signal arrived from Meridor. It did not come till the next morning, for the count had felt himself so feeble that he had been forced to take a night's rest. But early in the morning a messenger came to announce to Bussy that the count had set off for Paris in a litter, followed on horseback by Remy, Diana, and Gertrude. Bussy jumped on his horse, and took the same road.

CHAPTER LXXI.

WHAT TEMPER THE KING WAS IN WHEN ST. LUC REAPPEARED AT THE LOUVRE.

SINCE the departure of Catherine, Henri, however confident in his ambassador, had thought only of arming himself against the attacks of his brother. He amused, or rather ennuyed, himself by drawing up long lists of proscriptions, in which were inscribed in alphabetical order all who had not shown themselves zealous for his cause. The lists became longer every day, and at the S—— and the L——, that is to say, twice over, was inscribed the name of M. de St. Luc. Chicot, in the midst of all this, was, little by little, and man by man, enrolling an army for his master. One evening Chicot entered the room where the king sat at supper.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"M. de St. Luc."

"M. de St. Luc?"

"Yes."

"At Paris?"

"Yes."

"At the Louvre?"

"Yes."

The king rose, red and agitated.

"What has he come for? The traitor!"

"Who knows?"

"He comes, I am sure, as deputy from the states of Anjou—as an envoy from my rebellious brother. He makes use of the rebellion as a safe conduct to come here and insult me."

"Who knows?"

"Or perhaps he comes to ask me for his property, of which I have kept back the revenues, which may have been rather an abuse of power, as, after all, he has committed no crime."

"Who knows?"

"Ah, you repeat eternally the same

thing; mort de ma vie! you tire my patience out with your eternal 'Who knows?'"

"Eh! mordieu! do you think you are very amusing with your eternal questions?"

"At least you might reply something."

"And what should I reply? Do you take me for an ancient oracle? It is you who are tiresome with your foolish suppositions."

"M. Chicot?"

"M. Henri."

"Chicot, my friend, you see my grief and you laugh at me."

"Do not have any grief."

"But every one betrays me."

"Who knows? Ventre de biche! who knows?"

Henri went down to his cabinet, where, at the news of his return, a number of gentlemen had assembled, who were looking at St. Luc with evident distrust and animosity. He, however, seemed quite unmoved by this. He had brought his wife with him also, and she was seated, wrapped in her traveling-cloak, when the king entered in an excited state.

"Ah, monsieur, you here!" he cried.

"Yes, sire," replied St. Luc.

"Really, your presence at the Louvre surprises me."

"Sire, I am only surprised that, under the circumstances, your majesty did not expect me."

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Sire, your majesty is in danger."

"Danger!" cried the courtiers.

"Yes, gentlemen, a real, serious danger, in which the king has need of the smallest as well as the greatest of those devoted to him; therefore I come to lay at his feet my humble services."

"Ah!" said Chicot, "you see, my son, that I was right to say, 'who knows.'"

Henri did not reply at once; he would not yield immediately. After a pause, he said, "Monsieur, you have only done your duty: your services are due to us."

"The services of all the king's subjects are due to him, I know, sire; but in these times many people forget to pay their debts. I, sire, come to pay mine, happy that your majesty will receive me among the number of your creditors."

"Then," said Henri, in a softer tone, "you return without any other motive than that which you state; without any mission, or safe-conduct?"

"Sire, I return simply and purely for that reason. Now, your majesty may throw me into the Bastille, or have me shot, but I shall have done my duty. Sire, Anjou is on fire; Touraine is about to revolt; Guienne is rising. M. le Duc d'Anjou is hard at work."

"He is well supported, is he not?"

"Sire, M. de Bussy, firm as he is, cannot make your brother brave."

"Ah! he trembles, then, the rebel."

"Let me go and shake St. Luc's hand," said Chicot, advancing.

The king followed him, and going up to his old favorite, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said—.

"You are welcome, St. Luc!"

"Ah! sire," cried St. Luc, kissing the king's hand, "I find again my beloved master."

"Yes, but you, my poor St. Luc, you have grown thin."

"It is with grief at having displeased your majesty," said a feminine voice. Now, although the voice was soft and respectful, Henri frowned, for it was as distasteful to him as the noise of thunder was to Augustus.

"Madame de St. Luc!" said he. "Ah! I forgot."

Jeanne threw herself at his feet.

"Rise, madame," said he, "I love all that bear the name of St. Luc." Jeanne took his hand and kissed it, but he withdrew it quickly.

"You must convert the king," said Chicot to the young woman, "you are pretty enough for it."

But Henri turned his back to her, and passing his arm round St. Luc's neck, said—

"Then we have made peace, St. Luc?"

"Say rather, sire, that the pardon is granted."

"Madame!" said Chicot, "a good wife should not leave her husband," and he pushed her after the king and St. Luc.

CHAPTER LXXII.

IN WHICH WE MEET TWO IMPORTANT PERSONAGES WHOM WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF FOR SOME TIME.

THERE are two of the personages mentioned in this story, about whom the reader has the right to ask for information. We mean an enormous monk, with thick eyebrows and large lips, whose neck was diminishing every day; and a large donkey whose sides were gradually swelling out like a balloon. The monk resembled a hogshead; and the ass was like a child's cradle, supported by four posts.

The one inhabited a cell at St. Genevieve, and the other the stable at the same convent. The one was called Gorenflot, and the other Panurge. Both were enjoying the most prosperous lot that ever fell to a monk and an ass.

The monks surrounded their illustrious brother with cares and attentions, and Panurge fared well for his master's sake.

If a missionary arrived from foreign countries, or a secret legate from the pope, they pointed out to him Brother Gorenflot, that double model of the church preaching and militant; they showed Gorenflot in all his glory, that is to say, in the midst of a feast, seated at a table in which a hollow had been cut on purpose for his sacred stomach, and they related with a noble pride that Gorenflot consumed the rations of eight ordinary monks. And when the new comer had piously contemplated this spectacle, the prior would say, "See how he eats! And if you had but heard his sermon one famous night, in which he offered to devote himself for the triumph of the faith. It is a mouth which speaks like that of St. Chrysostom, and swallows like that of Gargantua."

Every time that any one spoke of the sermon, Gorenflot sighed and said:

"What a pity I did not write it!"

"A man like you has no need to write," the prior would reply. "No, you speak from inspiration; you open your mouth, and the words of God flow from your lips."

"Do you think so?" sighed Gorenflot.

However, Gorenflot was not perfectly happy. He, who at first thought his banishment from the convent an immense misfortune, discovered in his exile infinite joys before unknown to him. He sighed for liberty; liberty with Chicot, the joyous companion, with Chicot, whom he loved without knowing why. Since his return to the convent, he had never been allowed to go out. He never attempted to combat this decision, but he grew sadder from day to day. The prior saw this, and at last said to him:

"My dear brother, no one can fight against his vocation; yours is to fight for the faith; go, then, fulfill your mission, only watch well over your precious life, and return for the great day."

"What great day?"

"That of the Fete Dieu."

"Ita," replied Gorenflot; it was the only Latin word he knew, and he used it on all occasions. "But give me some money to bestow in alms in a Christian manner."

"You have your text, have you not, dear brother?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Confide it to me."

"Willingly, but to you alone; it is this: 'The flail which threshes the corn.'"

"Oh, magnificent! sublime!" cried the prior.

"Now, my father, am I free?"

"Yes, my son, go and walk in the way of the Lord."

Gorenflot saddled Panurge, mounted him with the aid of two vigorous monks, and left the convent about seven in the evening. It was the same day on which St. Luc arrived in Paris from Meridor.

Gorenflot, having passed through the Rue St. Etienne, was going to have turned to the right, when suddenly Panurge stopped; a strong hand was laid on his croup.

"Who is there?" cried Gorenflot, in terror.——"A friend."

Gorenflot tried to turn, but he could not.

"What do you want?" said he.

"Will my venerable brother show me the way to the Corne d'Abondance?"

"Morbleu! it is M. Chicot," cried Gorenflot, joyfully.

"Just so; I was going to seek you at the convent, when I saw you come out, and followed you until we were alone. Ventre de biche! how thin you are!"

"But what are you carrying, M. Chicot?" said the monk, "you appear laden."

"It is some venison which I have stolen from the king."

"Dear M. Chicot! and under the other arm?"

"A bottle of Cyprus wine sent by a king to my king."

"Let me see!"

"It is my wine, and I love it much: do not you, brother?"

"Oh! oh!" cried Gorenflot, raising his eyes and hands to heaven, and beginning to sing in a voice which shook the neighboring windows. It was the first time he had sung for a month.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

DIANA'S SECOND JOURNEY TO PARIS.

LET us leave the two friends entering the Corne d'Abondance, and return to the litter of M. Monsoreau and to Bussy, who set out with the intention of following them. Not only is it not difficult for a cavalier well mounted to overtake foot travelers, but it is difficult not to pass them. This happened to Bussy.

It was the end of May, the heat was great, and about noon M. de Monsoreau wished to make a halt in a little wood, which was near the road, and as they had a horse laden with provisions, they remained there until the great heat of the day had gone by. During this time Bussy passed them, but he had not traveled, as we may imagine, without inquiring if a party on horseback, and a litter carried by peasants, had been seen. Until he had passed the village of Durtal, he had obtained the most satisfactory information, and, convinced that they were before him, had ridden on quickly. But he could see nothing of them, and suddenly all traces of them vanished, and on arriving at La Flèche he felt certain he must have passed them on the road. Then he remembered the little wood, and doubted not that they had been resting there when he passed. He installed himself at a little inn, which had the advantage of being opposite the principal hotel, where he doubted not that Monsoreau would stop; and he remained at the window watching. About four o'clock he saw a courier arrive, and half an hour afterward the whole party. He waited till nine o'clock, and then he saw the courier set out again, and after him the litter, then Diana, Remy, and Gertrude on horseback. He mounted his horse and followed them, keeping them in sight. Monsoreau scarcely allowed Diana to move from his side, but kept calling her every instant. After a little while, Bussy gave a long, shrill whistle, with which he had been in the habit of calling his servants at his hotel. Remy recognized it in a moment. Diana started, and looked at the young man, who made an affirmative sign; then he came up to her and whispered:

"It is he!"

"Who is speaking to you, madame?" said Monsoreau.

"To me, monsieur?"

"Yes, I saw a shadow pass close to you, and heard a voice."

"It is M. Remy; are you also jealous of him?"

"No, but I like people to speak out, it amuses me."

"There are some things which cannot be said aloud before M. le Comte, however," said Gertrude, coming to the rescue.

"Why not?"

"For two reasons; firstly, because some would not interest you, and some would interest you too much."

"And of which kind is what M. Remy has just whispered?"

"Of the latter."

"What did Remy say to you, madame?"

"I said, M. le Comte, that if you excite yourself so much, you will be dead before we have gone a third of the way."

Monsoreau grew deadly pale.

"He is expecting you behind," whispered Remy, again, "ride slowly, and he will overtake you."

Monsoreau, who heard a murmur, tried to rise and look back after Diana.

"Another movement like that, M. le

Comte, and you will bring on the bleeding again," said Remy.

Diana turned and rode back a little way, while Remy walked by the litter to occupy the count. A few seconds after, Bussy was by her side.

"You see I follow you," said he, after their first embrace.

"Oh! I shall be happy, if I know you are always so near to me."

"But by day he will see us."

"No; by day you can ride afar off; it is only I who will see you, Louis. From the summit of some hill, at the turn of some road, your plume waving, your handkerchief fluttering in the breeze, would speak to me in your name, and tell me that you love me."

"Speak on, my beloved Diana; you do not know what music I find in your voice."

"And when we travel by night, which we shall often do, for Remy has told him that the freshness of the evening is good for his wounds, then, as this evening, from time to time, I will stay behind, and we will tell each other, with a rapid pressure of the hands, all our thoughts of each other during the day."

"Oh! I love you! I love you!" murmured Bussy. "Oh! to see you, to press your hand, Diana."

Suddenly they heard a voice which made them both tremble, Diana with fear, and Bussy with anger.

"Diana!" it cried, "where are you? Answer me."

"Oh! it is he! I had forgotten him," said Diana. "Sweet dream, frightful awaking."

"Listen, Diana; we are together. Say one word, and nothing can separate us more; Diana, let us fly! What prevents us? Before us is happiness and liberty. One word, and we go; one word, and lost to him, you belong to me forever."

"And my father?"

"When he shall know how I love you?"

"Oh! a father!"

"I will do nothing by violence, dear Diana; order, and I obey."

"It is our destiny, Bussy; but be strong, and you shall see if I know how to love."

"Must we then separate?"

"Comtesse!" cried the voice, "reply, or, if I kill myself in doing it, I will jump from this infernal litter."

"Adieu, Bussy, he will do as he says."

"You pity him?"

"Jealous!" said Diana, with an adorable smile.

Bussy let her go.

In a minute she was by the litter, and found the count half fainting.

"Ah!" cried he, "where were you, madame?"

"Where should I have been? Behind you."

"At my side, madame; do not leave me again."

From time to time this scene was renewed. They all hoped he would die with rage; but he did not die: on the contrary, at the end of ten days, when they arrived at Paris, he was decidedly better. During these ten days Diana had conquered all Bussy's pride, and had persuaded him to come and visit Monsoreau, who always showed him much friendship. Remy watched the husband and gave notes to the wife.

"Esculapius and Mercury," said he; "my functions accumulate."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HOW THE AMBASSADOR OF THE DUC D'ANJOU ARRIVED AT THE LOUVRE, AND THE RECEPTION HE MET WITH.

As neither Catherine nor the Duc d'Anjou reappeared at the Louvre, the dissension between the brothers became apparently every day more and more certain. The king thought, "No news, bad news." The minions added, "Francois, badly counseled, has detained the queen-mother."

Badly counseled. In these words were comprised all the policy of this singular reign, and the three preceding ones. Badly counseled was Charles IX. when he authorized the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Badly counseled was Francois II. when he ordered the massacre at Amboise. Badly counseled had been Henri II. when he burned so many heretics and conspirators. And now they dared not say, "Your brother has the family blood in his veins; he wishes, like the rest, to

dethrone or poison; he would do to you what you did to your elder brother; what your elder brother did to his, what your mother has taught you to do to one another." Therefore they said, "Your brother is badly counseled."

Now, as only one person was able to counsel Francois, it was against Bussy that the cry was raised, which became every day more and more furious. At last the news was spread that the duke had sent an ambassador. At this the king grew pale with anger, and the minions swore that he should be cut to pieces, and a piece sent to all the provinces of France as a specimen of the king's anger.

Chicot said nothing, but he reflected. Now the king thought much of Chicot's reflections, and he questioned him about them.

"Sire," replied he, "if your brother sends an ambassador, it is because he feels himself strong enough to do so; he who is prudence itself. Now, if he is strong, we must temporize with him. Let us respect his ambassador, and receive him with civility. That engages you to nothing. Do you remember how your brother embraced Admiral Coligny, who came as ambassador from the Huguenots?".

"Then you approve of the policy of my brother Charles?"

"Not so, but I cite a fact; and I say to you, do not hurt a poor devil of a herald, or ambassador; perhaps we may find the way to seize the master, the mover, the chief, the great Duc d'Anjou, with the three Guises; and if you can shut them up in a place safer than the Louvre, do it."

"That is not so bad."

"Then why do you let all your friends bellow so?"

"Bellow!"

"Yes; I would say, roar, if they could be taken for lions, but they are more like bearded apes."

"Chicot, they are my friends."

"Friends! I would lay any bet to make them all turn against you before to-morrow."

"Well, what do you advise?"

"To wait, my son. Half the wisdom of Solomon lies in that word. If an ambassador arrive, receive him courteously. And as to your brother, kill him if you can and like, but do not degrade him. He is a great knave, but he is a Valois; besides, he can do that well enough for himself."

"It is true, Chicot."

"One more lesson that you owe me. Now let me sleep, Henri; for the last week I have been engaged in fuddling a monk."

"A monk! the one of whom you have already spoken to me?"

"Just so. You promised him an abbey."

"I?"

"Pardieu! it is the least you can do for him, after all he has done for you."

"He is then still devoted to me?"

"He adores you. Apropos, my son—"

"What?"

"In three weeks it will be the Fete Dieu."

"Well!"

"Are we to have some pretty little procession?"

"I am the Most Christian King, and it is my duty to set an example to my subjects."

"And you will, as usual, stop at the four great convents of Paris?"

"Yes."

"At St. Genevieve?"

"Yes, that is the second I stop at."

"Good."

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing—I was curious. Now I know all I want, so good-night, Henri!"

But just as Chicot prepared to leave, a great noise was heard.

"What is that noise?" said the king.

"It is ordained that I am not to sleep. Henri, you must get me a room in the town, or I must leave your service; the Louvre becomes insupportable."

At this moment the captain of the guards entered, saying, "Sire, it is an envoy from M. le Duc d'Anjou."

"With a suite?"

"No, sire, alone."

"Then you must receive him doubly well, Henri, for he is a brave fellow."

"Well," said the king, very pale, but trying to look calm, "let all my court assemble in the great hall."

CHAPTER LXXV.

WHICH IS ONLY THE END OF THE PRECEDING ONE.

HENRI sat on his throne in the great hall, and around him was grouped an eager crowd. He looked pale and frowning.

"Sire," said Quelus to the king, "do you know the name of the ambassador?"

"No; but what does it matter?"

"Sire, it is M. de Bussy; the insult is doubled."

"I see no insult," said the king, with affected sang-froid. "Let him enter," continued he. Bussy, with his hat in his hand, and his head erect, advanced straight to the king, and waited, with his usual look of pride, to be interrogated.

"You here, M. de Bussy!" said the king; "I thought you were in Anjou."

"Sire, I was, but you see I have quitted it."

"And what brings you here?"

"The desire of presenting my humble respects to your majesty."

The king and courtiers looked astonished; they expected a different answer.

"And nothing else?" said the king.

"I will add, sire, the orders I received from the Duc d'Anjou to join his respects to mine."

"And the duke said nothing else?"

"Only that he was on the point of returning with the queen-mother, and wished me to apprise your majesty of the return of one of your most faithful subjects."

The king was choked with surprise.

"Good-morning, M. de Bussy," said Chicot.

Bussy turned, astonished to find a friend in that place.

"Good-day, M. Chicot; I am delighted to see you."

"Is that all you have to say, M. de Bussy?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire; anything that remains to be said, will be said by the duke himself."

The king rose and went away, and Bussy continued to converse with Chicot, until the king called to him. As soon as Bussy was alone, Quelus approached him.

"Good-morning, M. Quelus," said Bussy graciously; "may I have the honor of asking how you are?"

"Very bad."

"Oh, mon Dieu! what is the matter?"

"Something annoys me infinitely."

"Something! And are you not powerful enough to get rid of it?"

"It is not something, but some one, that M. Quelus means," said Maugiron, advancing.

"And whom I advise him to get rid of," said Schomberg, coming forward on the other side.

"Ah, M. de Schomberg! I did not recognize you."

"Perhaps not; is my face still blue?"

"Not so; you are very pale. Are you not well?"

"Yes, it is with anger."

"Oh! then you have also some one who annoys you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And I also," said Maugiron.

"Really, gentlemen, you all look very gloomy."

"You forget me," said D'Epernon, planting himself before Bussy.

"Pardon me, M. d'Epernon, you were behind the others, as usual, and I have so little the pleasure of knowing you, that it was not for me to speak first."

It was strange to see Bussy smiling and calm among those four furious faces, whose eyes spoke with so terrible an eloquence, that he must have been blind or stupid not to have understood their language.

But Bussy never lost his smile.

"It seems to me that there is an echo in this room," said he quietly.

"Look, gentlemen," said Quelus, "how provincial M. de Bussy has become; he has a beard, and no knot to his sword; he has black boots and a gray hat."

"It is an observation that I was just making to myself, my dear sir; seeing you so well dressed, I said to myself, 'How much harm a few weeks' absence does to a man; here am I, Louis de Cler-

mont, forced to take a little Gascon gentleman as a model of taste.' But let me pass; you are so near to me that you tread on my feet, and I feel it in spite of my boots."

And turning away, he advanced toward St. Luc, whom he saw approaching.

"Incredible!" cried all the young men, "we insulted him; he took no notice."

"There is something in it," said Quelus.

"Well!" said the king, advancing, "what were you and M. de Bussy saying?"

"Do you wish to know what M. de Bussy said, sire?"

"Yes, I am curious."

"Well, I trod on his foot, and insulted him, and he said nothing."

"What, gentlemen," cried Henri, feigning anger, "you dared to insult a gentleman in the Louvre!"

"Alas! yes, sire, and he said nothing."

"Well! I am going to the queen."

As the king went out of the great door, St. Luc re-entered by a side one, and advanced toward the four gentlemen.

"Pardon, M. Quelus," said he, "but do you still live in the Rue St. Honore?"

"Yes, my dear friend; why do you ask?"

"I have two words to say to you."

"Ah!"

"And you, M. de Schomberg?"

"Rue Bethisy," said Schomberg, astonished.

"D'Epernon's address I know."

"Rue de Grenelle."

"You are my neighbor. And you, Maugiron?"

"Near the Louvre. But I begin to understand; you come from M. de Bussy."

"Never mind from whom I come; I have to speak to you, that is all."

"To all four of us?"

"Yes."

"Then if you cannot speak here, let us all go to Schomberg's; it is close by."

"So be it."

And the five gentlemen went out of the Louvre arm in arm.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

HOW M. DE ST. LUC ACQUITTED HIMSELF OF THE COMMISSION GIVEN TO HIM BY BUSSY.

Let us leave St. Luc a little while in Schomberg's room, and see what had passed between him and Bussy.

Once out of the hall, St. Luc had stopped and looked anxiously at his friend.

"Are you ill?" said he, "you are so pale; you look as though you were about to faint."

"No, I am only choking with anger."

"You do not surely mind those fellows?"

"You shall see."

"Come, Bussy, be calm."

"You are charming, really; be calm, indeed! if you had had half said to you that I have had, some one would have been dead before this."

"Well, what do you want?"

"You are my friend; you have already given me a terrible proof of it."

"Ah! my dear friend," said St. Luc, who believed Monsoreau dead and buried, "do not thank me, it is not worth while; certainly the thrust was a good one, and succeeded admirably, but it was the king who showed it me, when he kept me here a prisoner at the Louvre."

"Dear friend."

"Never mind Monsoreau; tell me about Diana. Was she pleased at last? Does she pardon me? When will the wedding take place?"

"Oh! my dear friend, we must wait till Monsoreau is dead."

"What!" cried St. Luc, starting back as though he had put his foot on a pointed nail.

"Yes; poppies are not such dangerous plants as you thought; he did not die from his fall on them, but is alive and more furious than ever."

"Really?"

"Yes, and he talks of nothing but vengeance, and of killing you on the first occasion."

"And I have announced his death to every one; he will find his heirs in mourning. But he shall not give me the lie; I shall meet him again, and if he escapes me a second time—"

"Calm yourself, my dear St. Luc; really, I am better off than you would think; it is the duke whom he suspects, and of whom he is jealous. I am his dear Bussy—his precious friend. That is only natural, for it was that fool of a Remy who cured him."

"What an idiot he must have been!"

"He has an idea that, as an honest man and a doctor, it is his duty to cure people. However, Monsoreau says he owes his life to me, and confides his wife to my care."

"Ah! I understand that this makes you wait more patiently for his death. However, I am quite thunderstruck at the news."

"But now, my friend, let us leave Monsoreau."

"Yes, let us enjoy life while he is still ill; but once he is well, I shall order myself a suit of mail, have new locks put on my doors, and you must ask the Duc d'Anjou if his mother has not given him some antidote against poison. Meanwhile, let us amuse ourselves."

"Well, my dear friend, you see you have only rendered me half a service."

"Do you wish me to finish it?"

"Yes, in another way."

"Speak."

"Are you great friends with those four gentlemen?"

"Ma foi! we are something like cats and dogs in the sun; as long as we all get the heat, we agree, but if one of us took the warmth from another, then I do not answer for the consequences."

"Well! will you go for me to M. Quelus, first?"

"Ah!"

"And ask him what day it will please him that I should cut his throat, or he mine?"

"I will."

"You do not mind it?"

"Not the least in the world. I will go at once if you wish it."

"One moment; as you go, just call on M. Schomberg and make him the same proposal."

"Schomberg, too? Diable, how you go on! Well, as you wish."

"Then, my dear St. Luc, as you are so amiable, go also to M. Maugiron, and ask him to join the party."

"What, three! Bussy, you cannot mean it. I hope that is all."

"No; from him go to D'Epernon."

"Four!"

"Even so, my dear friend; I need not recommend to a man like you to proceed with courtesy and politeness toward these gentlemen. Let the thing be done in gallant fashion."

"You shall be content, my friend. What are your conditions?"

"I make none; I accept theirs."

"Your arms?"

"What they like."

"The day, place, and hour?"

"Whatever suits them."

"But—"

"Oh! never mind such trifles, but do it quickly; I will walk in the little garden of the Luxembourg; you will find me there when you have executed your commission."

"You will wait then?"

"Yes."

"It may be long."

"I have time."

We know how St. Luc found the four young men, and accompanied them to Schomberg's house. St. Luc remained in the antechamber, waiting until, according to the etiquette of the day, the four young men were installed in the salon ready to receive him. Then an usher came and saluted St. Luc, who followed him to the threshold of the salon, where he announced M. d'Epinay de St. Luc.

Schomberg then rose and saluted his visitor, who, to mark the character of the visit, instead of returning it, put on his hat. Schomberg then, turning toward Quelus, said—

"I have the honor to present to you M. Jacques de Levis, comte de Quelus."

The two gentlemen bowed, and then the same ceremony was gone through with the others. This done, the four friends sat down, but St. Luc remained standing and said to Quelus—

"M. le Comte, you have insulted M. le Comte Louis de Clermont d'Amboise,

seigneur de Bussy, who presents to you his compliments, and calls you to single combat on any day and hour, and with such arms as may please you. Do you accept?"

"Certainly; M. de Bussy does me much honor."

"Your day and hour, M. le Comte?"

"To-morrow morning at seven o'clock."

"Your arms?"

"Rapier and dagger, if that suits M. de Bussy."

St. Luc bowed. Then he addressed the same questions to the others, and received the same answers.

"If we all choose the same day and hour, M. de Bussy will be rather embarrassed," said Schomberg.

"Certainly," replied St. Luc, "M. de Bussy may be embarrassed, but he says that the circumstance would not be new to him, as it has already happened at the Tournelles."

"And he would fight us all four?"

"All four."

"Separately?"

"Separately, or at once."

The four young men looked at each other; then Quelus, red with anger, said:

"It is very fine of M. de Bussy, but however little we may be worth, we can each do our own work; we will accept, therefore, the count's proposal, fighting separately, or rather, which will be still better, as we do not seek to assassinate a gallant man, chance shall decide which of us shall fight M. de Bussy."

"And the three others?"

"Oh! M. de Bussy has too many friends, and we too many enemies, for them to remain with folded arms. Do you agree to this, gentlemen?"

"Yes!" cried all.

"If MM. Ribeirac, Antragues, and Livarot would join the party, it would be complete."

"Gentlemen," said St. Luc, "I will transmit your desires to M. de Bussy, and I believe I may promise that he is too courteous not to agree to your wishes. It therefore only remains for me to thank you in his name."

Then he took his leave, after throwing his purse to the four lackeys, whom he found outside, to drink to their master's healths.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

IN WHAT RESPECT M. DE ST. LUC WAS MORE CIVILIZED THAN M. DE BUSSY, THE LESSONS WHICH HE GAVE HIM, AND THE USE WHICH M. DE BUSSY MADE OF THEM.

ST. LUC returned, proud of having executed his commission so well. Bussy thanked him, but looked sad, which was not natural to him.

"Have I done badly?" said St. Luc.

"Ma foi, my dear friend, I only regret you did not say, 'at once.'"

"Why! what is the hurry?"

"I wish to die as soon as possible."

St. Luc looked at him in astonishment.

"Die! at your age, with your name, and Diana!"

"Yes, I shall kill them, I know, but I shall receive some good blow which will tranquilize me forever."

"What black ideas, Bussy!"

"A husband whom I thought dead, and who has returned to life; a wife who can scarcely quit the bedside of the pretended dying man. Not to see her, smile on her, touch her hand. Mon Dieu!—"

St. Luc interrupted him with a burst of laughter. "Oh!" cried he, "the innocent man. Why, no lover can be more fortunate than you."

"Prove that to me."

"You are the friend of M. de Monsoreau."

"Yes, I am ashamed to say, he calls me his friend."

"Well! be his friend."

"Oh! and abuse this title!"

"Is he really your friend?"

"He says so."

"No; for he makes you unhappy. Now the end of friendship is to make one another happy. At least, so his majesty says, and he is learned in friendship. So, if he makes you unhappy, he is not your friend; therefore you may treat him either as a stranger, and take his wife from him, or as an enemy, and kill him if he murmurs."

"In fact, I hate him. But do you not think he loves me?"

"Diable! Take away his wife and see."

"I must continue to be a man of honor."

"And let Madame de Monsoreau cure her husband both physically and morally. For it is certain that if you get yourself killed, she will attach herself to the only man who remains to her."

Bussy frowned.

"But," added St. Luc, "here is my wife; she always gives good advice. She has been picking herself a bouquet in the gardens of the queen-mother, and will be in a good humor. Listen to her; she speaks gold."

Jeanne arrived radiant, full of happiness and fun. Bussy saluted her in a friendly manner, and she held out her hand to him, saying, with a smile, "How go on the love affairs?"

"They are dying."

"They are wounded and fainting; perhaps you can restore them, Jeanne?"

"Let me see; show me the wound."

"In two words, this is it: M. de Bussy does not like smiling on M. de Monsoreau, and he thinks of retiring."

"And leaving Diana to him?"

"Oh! madame, St. Luc does not tell you that I wish to die."

"Poor Diana!" murmured Jeanne, "decidedly men are ungrateful."

"Good! this is the conclusion my wife draws."

"I, ungrateful!" cried Bussy, "because I fear to render my love vile, by practicing a disgraceful hypocrisy?"

"Oh! monsieur, that is only a pretext. If you were really in love, you would fear but one thing—not to be loved in return."

"But, madame, there are sacrifices—"

"Not another word. Confess that you love Diana no longer; it will be more worthy of a gallant man."

Bussy grew pale.

"You do not dare to tell her; well, I will."——"Madame! madame!"

"You are rich, you men, with your sacrifices. And does she make none? What! expose herself to be massacred by that tiger of a Monsoreau, preserve her position only by employing a strength of will of which Samson or Hannibal would have been incapable. Oh! I swear, Diana is sublime, I could not do a quarter of what she does every day."

"Thank you!" said St. Luc.

"And he hesitates!" continued she, "he does not fall on his knees and say his mea culpa."

"You are right," said Bussy, "I am but a man, that is to say, an imperfect creature, inferior to the most commonplace woman."

"It is lucky you are convinced of it."

"What do you order me?"

"To go at once and pay a visit—"

"To M. de Monsoreau?"

"Who speaks of him?—to Diana."

"But he never leaves her."

"When you went so often to see Madame de Barbezieux, had she not always near her that great ape who bit you because he was jealous?"

Bussy began to laugh, and St. Luc and Jeanne followed his example.

"Madame," then said Bussy, "I am going to M. de Monsoreau's house; adieu."

He went there, and found the count in bed; he was delighted to see him, and told him that Remy promised that his wound would be cured in three weeks. Bussy recounted to him the commission with which he had been charged, and his visit to the court.

"The duke has still projects on foot, has he not?"——"I believe so."

"Do not compromise yourself for that bad man; I know him: he is perfidious, and will not hesitate to betray you."

"I know it."

"You are my friend, and I wish to put you on your guard."

"You must sleep after the dressing of your wound," said Remy.

"Yes, my dear doctor. My friend, take a turn in the garden with Madame de Monsoreau."

"I am at your orders," replied Bussy.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE PRECAUTIONS OF M. DE MONSOREAU.

St. Luc was right, and Jeanne was right, and Bussy soon acknowledged it. As for Diana, she gave herself up to the

two instincts that Figaro recognizes as inborn in mankind, to love and to deceive. M. de Monsoreau grew better and better. He had escaped from fever, thanks to the application of cold water, that new remedy which Providence had discovered to Ambroise Pare, when all at once he received a great shock at hearing of the arrival in Paris of the duke with the queen-mother. The day after his arrival, the duke, under the pretext of asking after him, presented himself at his hotel, and it was impossible to close his door against a prince who showed so much interest in him. M. de Monsoreau therefore was obliged to receive the prince, who was most amiable to him and to his wife. As soon as he was gone, M. de Monsoreau took Diana's arm, and in spite of Remy's remonstrances walked three times round his armchair; and, from his satisfied air, Diana was sure he was meditating on some project.

The next day the duke came again, and this time Monsoreau walked round his room. That evening Diana warned Bussy that her husband had certainly some project in his head. A few minutes after, when Bussy and Monsoreau were alone, "When I think," said Monsoreau, "that this prince, who smiles on me, is my mortal enemy, and tried to have me assassinated by M. de St. Luc—"

"Oh, assassinated! take care, M. le Comte. St. Luc is a gentleman, and you confess yourself that you provoked him, drew the sword first, and received your wound in fair fight."

"Certainly; but it is not the less true that he obeyed the wishes of M. d'Anjou."

"Listen! I know M. de St. Luc, and I can assure you he is devoted to the king, and hates the duke. If your wound had come from Antragues, Livarot, or Ribeirac, it might be so; but not from St. Luc."

"You do not know," replied Monsoreau, obstinate in his opinion. At last he was able to go down into the garden. "That will do," said he; "now we will move."

"Why move?" said Remy. "The air is good here, and there is plenty of amusement."

"Too much; M. d'Anjou fatigues me with his visits, and he always brings with him a crowd of gentlemen, and the noise of their spurs destroys my nerves."

"But where are you going?"

"I have ordered them to get ready my little house at the Tournelles."

Bussy and Diana exchanged a look of loving remembrance.

"What, that little place?" cried Remy, imprudently.

"What! do you know it?"

"Who does not know the houses of the chief huntsman? particularly I, who lived in the Rue Beautrellis."

"Yes, yes, I will go there. It is a fortress, and one can see from the window, three hundred yards off, who is coming to visit you, and avoid them if you like, particularly when you are well!"

Bussy bit his lips; he feared a time might come when Monsoreau might avoid him. Diana thought of the time when she had seen Bussy in that house, lying fainting on the bed.

"You cannot do it," said Remy.

"Why not, if you please, monsieur?"

"Because the chief huntsman of France must hold receptions—must keep valets and equipages. Let him have a palace for his dogs, if he likes, but not a dog-kennel for himself."

"It is true, but—"

"But I am the doctor of the mind as of the body; it is not your residence here that displeases you."

"What then?"

"That of madame; therefore send her away."

"Separate?" cried Monsoreau, fixing on Diana a look, more of anger than love.

"Then give up your place—send in your resignation. I believe it would be wise; if you do not do your duty, you will displease the king, and if you do—"

"I will do anything but quit the countess," said Monsoreau, with closely-shut teeth. As he spoke, they heard in the courtyard a noise of voices and horses' feet.

"The duke again!" cried he.

"Yes," said Remy.

Immediately after the prince entered,

and Monsoreau saw his first glance given to Diana. He brought to her, as a present, one of those masterpieces, of which the artists of that day were in the habit of producing two or three in the course of a lifetime. It was a poniard, with a handle of chased gold. This handle was a smelling-bottle, and on the blade a chase was carved with admirable skill; horses, dogs, trees, game, and hunters, mingled together in a harmonious pell-mell, on this blade of azure and gold.

"Let me see," cried Monsoreau, who feared there was a note hidden in the handle.

The prince separated the two parts. "To you, who are a hunter," said he, "I give the blade: to the countess, the handle. Good-morning, Bussy, you are then a friend of the count's, now?"

Diana reddened, but Bussy said:

"Your highness forgets that you asked me to inquire after M. de Monsoreau."

"It is true."

The prince sat down, and began to talk to Diana. In a few minutes he said:

"Count, it is dreadfully warm in your rooms. I see the countess is stifling. I will give her my arm for a turn in the garden."

The husband looked furious.

"Give me an arm," said he to Bussy, and he got up and followed his wife.

"Ah!" said the duke, "it seems you are better."

"Yes, monseigneur, and I hope soon to be able to accompany Madame de Monsoreau wherever she goes."

"Good; but meanwhile, do not fatigue yourself."

Monsoreau was obliged to sit down, but he kept them in view.

"Count," said he to Bussy, "will you be amiable enough to escort Madame de Monsoreau this evening to my house at the Tournelles?"

"You cannot do that, monsieur," said Remy.

"Why not?"

"Because M. d'Anjou would never forgive you if you helped to play him such a trick."

Bussy was about to cry, "What do I care?" but a glance from Remy stopped him.

"Remy is right," said Monsoreau, "it would injure you; to-morrow I will go myself."

"You will lose your place."

"It is possible; but I shall keep my wife."

The next day they went to the old house; Diana took her old room, with the bed of white and gold damask. A corridor only separated it from that of the count. Bussy tore his hair with rage.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

A VISIT TO THE HOUSE AT LES TOURNELLES.

THE duke became more and more in love with Diana, as she seemed always to escape him, and with his love for her, his hatred of Monsoreau increased. On the other side he had not renounced his political hopes, but had recommenced his underhand machinations. The moment was favorable, for many wavering conspirators had been encouraged by the kind of triumph which the weakness of the king, and the cunning of Catherine, had given to the duke; however, he no longer confided his projects to Bussy, and showed him only a hypocritical friendship. He was vaguely uneasy at seeing him at Monsoreau's house, and envious of the confidence that Monsoreau, so suspicious of himself, placed in him. He was frightened also at the joy and happiness which shone in Diana's face. He knew that flowers only bloom in the light of the sun, and women in that of love. She was visibly happy, and this annoyed him. Determined to use his power, both for love and vengeance, he thought it would be absurd to be stayed in this purpose by such ridiculous obstacles as the jealousy of a husband, and the repugnance of a wife. One day he ordered his equipages, intending to visit Monsoreau. He was told that he had moved to his house in the Rue St. Antoine.

"Let us go there," said he to Bussy. Soon the place was in commotion at the arrival of the twenty-four handsome cavaliers, each with two lackeys, who formed the prince's suite. Both Bussy

and the prince knew the house well; they both went in, but while the prince entered the room, Bussy remained on the staircase. It resulted from this arrangement that the duke was received by Monsoreau alone, while Bussy was received by Diana, while Gertrude kept watch. Monsoreau, always pale, grew livid at sight of the prince.

"Monseigneur, here! really it is too much honor for my poor house!" cried he, with a visible irony.

The prince smiled. "Wherever a suffering friend goes, I follow him," replied he. "How are you?"

"Oh, much better; I can already walk about, and in a week I shall be quite well."

"Was it your doctor who prescribed for you the air of the Bastille?" asked the prince, with the most innocent air possible.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Did you not like the Rue des Petits-Peres?"

"No, monseigneur; I had too much company there — they made too much noise."

"But you have no garden here."

"I did not like the garden."

The prince bit his lips. "Do you know, comte," said he, "that many people are asking the king for your place?"

"On what pretext, monseigneur?"

"They say you are dead."

"Monseigneur, you can answer for it that I am not."

"I answer for nothing; you bury yourself as though you were dead."

It was Monsoreau's turn to bite his lips.

"Well, then, I must lose my place," said he.——"Really?"

"Yes; there are things I prefer to it."

"You are very disinterested."

"It is my character, monseigneur."

"Then of course you will not mind the king's knowing your character?"

"Who will tell him?"

"Diable! if he asks me about you, I must repeat our conversation."

"Ma foi! monseigneur, if all they say in Paris were reported to the king, his two ears would not be enough to listen with."

"What do they say at Paris, monsieur?" asked the prince sharply.

Monsoreau tried to calm himself. "How should a poor invalid, as I am, know?" said he. "If the king is angry at seeing his work badly done, he is wrong."

"How so?"

"Because, doubtless, my accident proceeds, to some extent, from him."

"Explain yourself."

"M. de St. Luc, who wounded me, is a dear friend of the king's. It was the king who taught him the thrust by which he wounded me, and it might have been the king who prompted him."

"You are right; but still the king is the king."

"Until he is so no longer."

The duke trembled. "Is not Madame de Monsoreau here?" said he.

"Monseigneur, she is ill, or she would have come to present her respects to you."

"Ill! poor woman! it must be grief at seeing you suffer."

"Yes, and the fatigue of moving."

"Let us hope it will be a short indisposition. You have so skillful a doctor."

"Yes, that dear Remy—"

"Why, he is Bussy's doctor."

"He has lent him to me."

"You are, then, great friends?"

"He is my best, I might say my only, friend."

"Adieu, comte!"

As the duke raised the tapestry, he fancied he saw the skirt of a dress disappear into the next room, and immediately Bussy appeared at his post in the middle of the corridor. Suspicion grew stronger with the duke.

"We are going," said he to Bussy, who ran downstairs without replying; while the duke, left alone, tried to penetrate the corridor where he had seen the silk dress vanish. But, turning, he saw that Monsoreau had followed, and was standing at the door.

"Your highness mistakes your way," said he.

"True," said the duke, "thank you." And he went down with rage in his heart. When he returned home, Aurilly glided into his room.

"Well," said the duke, "I am baffled by the husband!"

"And, perhaps, also by the lover, monseigneur."

"What do you say?"

"The truth."——"Speak, then."

"I hope your highness will pardon me—it was in your service."

"I pardon you in advance. Go on."

"After your highness had gone upstairs, I watched under a shed in the courtyard."

"Ah! What did you see?"

"I saw a woman's dress; I saw this woman lean forward, and then I heard the sound of a long and tender kiss."

"But who was the man?"

"I cannot recognize arms."

"No, but you might gloves."

"Indeed, it seemed to me—"

"That you recognized them?"

"It was only a guess."

"Never mind."

"Well, monseigneur, they looked like the gloves of M. de Bussy."

"Buff, embroidered with gold, were they not?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Ah! Bussy! yes, it was Bussy. Oh, I was blind, and yet not blind; but I could not believe in so much audacity."

"But your highness must not believe it too lightly; might there not have been a man hidden in her room?"

"Yes, doubtless, but Bussy, who was in the corridor, would have seen him."

"That is true."

"And then the gloves—"

"Yes, and besides the kiss, I heard—"

"What?"

"Three words, 'Till to-morrow evening.'"

"Oh! mon Dieu!"

"So that, if you like, we can make sure."

"Aurilly, we will go."

"Your highness knows I am at your orders."

"Ah! Bussy, a traitor! Bussy, the honest man—Bussy, who does not wish me to be king of France;" and the duke, smiling with an infernal joy, dismissed Aurilly.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE WATCHERS.

THE duke kept Bussy near him all day, so as not to lose sight of his movements. Bussy did not care, so that he had his evenings free. At ten o'clock he wrapped himself in his cloak, and with a rope ladder under his arm went toward the Bastille. The duke, who did not know that he had a ladder, and could not believe in any one walking alone at night through the streets of Paris, thought Bussy would certainly call at his hotel for a horse and a servant, and lost ten minutes in preparations. During those ten minutes, Bussy, active and in love, had already gone three-fourths of the distance. He was lucky, as brave people generally are, and met with no accident by the way, and on arriving saw a light in the windows. It was the signal agreed on between him and Diana. He threw his ladder up to the balcony, it had six hooks to it, and was sure to fasten itself somewhere. At the noise, Diana put out her light and opened the window to fasten the ladder. The thing was done in a moment. Diana looked all around; the street seemed deserted. Then she signed to Bussy to mount, and he was up in five seconds. The moment was happily chosen, for while he got in at the window, M. de Monsoreau, after having listened patiently for a quarter of an hour at his wife's door, descended the stairs painfully, leaning on the arm of a confidential valet, and it so happened that he opened the street door just as the ladder was drawn up, and the window closed. He looked around, but the streets were deserted.

"You have been badly informed," said he to the servant.

"No, monsieur, I have just left the Hotel d'Anjou, and they told me that the duke had ordered two horses for this evening. But perhaps it was not to come here."

"Where else should he go?" said Monsoreau, with a somber air. He, like all jealous persons, thought the whole world had nothing to do but to torment him.

"Perhaps I should have done better to stay in her room," murmured he. "But they probably have signals for correspond-

ing; she would have warned him of my presence, and I should have learned nothing. It is better to watch outside. Come, conduct me to the hiding-place, whence you say one can see everything."

"Come, monsieur."

About twenty-five steps from the door was an enormous heap of stones belonging to demolished houses, and serving for fortifications to the children of the neighborhood when they played at battles. In the midst was a space, which could contain two people. The valet spread a cloak, on which Monsoreau sat down, while his servant sat at his feet, with a loaded musket placed beside him. Diana had prudently drawn her thick curtains, so that scarcely a ray of light showed through, to betray that there was life in this gloomy house.

They had been watching about ten minutes, when two horses appeared at the end of the street. The valet pointed to them. "I see," said Monsoreau.

The two men got off their horses, and tied them up at the corner of the Hotel des Tournelles.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I believe we have arrived too late; he must have gone straight from your hotel, and must have entered."

"Perhaps so; but if we did not see him go in, we can see him come out."

"Yes, but when?"

"When we please."

"Would it be too curious to ask how you mean to manage?"

"Nothing is more easy; we have but to knock at the door, and ask after M. de Monsoreau. Our lover will be frightened at the noise, and as you enter the house he will come out at the window, and I, who am hidden outside, shall see him."

"And Monsoreau?"

"What can he say? I am his friend, and was uneasy about him, as he looked so ill yesterday; nothing can be more simple."

"It is very ingenious, monseigneur."

"Do you hear what they say?" asked Monsoreau of his valet.

"No, monsieur, but we soon shall, for they are coming nearer."

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "here is a heap of stones, which seems made on purpose for us."

"Yes, but wait a moment, perhaps we can see through the opening of the curtain." And they stood for some minutes trying to find a place to peep through. Meanwhile, Monsoreau was boiling with impatience, and his hand approached the musket.

"Oh! shall I suffer this?" murmured he, "shall I devour this affront also? No, my patience is worn out. Mordieu! that I can neither sleep, nor wake, nor even suffer quietly, because a shameful caprice has lodged in the idle brain of this miserable prince. No, I am not a complaisant valet; I am the Comte de Monsoreau, and if he comes near, on my word, I will blow his brains out. Light the match, Rene."

At this moment, just as the prince was about to seek his hiding-place, leaving his companion to knock at the door, Aurilly touched his arm.

"Well, monsieur, what is it?" asked the prince.

"Come away, monseigneur, come."

"Why so?"

"Do you not see something shining there to the left?"

"I see a spark among that heap of stones."

"It is the match of a musket, or arquebuse."

"Ah! who the devil can be in ambush there?"

"Some friend or servant of Bussy's. Let us go and make a détour, and return another way. The servant will give the alarm, and we shall see Bussy come out of the window."

"You are right; come;" and they went to their horses.

"They are going," said the valet.

"Yes. Did you recognize them?"

"They seemed to me to be the prince and Aurilly."

"Just so. But I shall soon be more sure still."

"What will monsieur do?"

"Come."

Meanwhile, the duke and Aurilly turned into the Rue St. Catherine, intending to return by the boulevard of the Bastille.

Monsoreau went in, and ordered his litter.

What the duke had foreseen happened. At the noise that Monsoreau made, Bussy took the alarm, the light was extinguished, the ladder fixed, and Bussy, to his great regret, was obliged to fly, like Romeo, but without having, like him, seen the sun rise and heard the lark sing. Just as he touched the ground, and Diana had thrown him the ladder, the duke and Aurilly arrived at the corner of the Bastille. They saw a shadow suspended from Diana's window, but this shadow disappeared almost instantaneously at the corner of the Rue St. Paul.

"Monsieur," said the valet to Monsoreau, "we shall wake up the household."

"What do I care?" cried Monsoreau, furiously. "I am master here, I believe, and I have at least the right to do what M. d'Anjou wished to do."

The litter was got ready, and, drawn by two stout horses, it was soon at the Hotel d'Anjou.

The duke and Aurilly had so recently come in that their horses were not unsaddled. Monsoreau, who had the entrée, appeared on the threshold just as the duke, after having thrown his hat on a chair, was holding out his boots to a valet to pull off. A servant, preceding him by some steps, announced M. de Monsoreau. A thunderbolt breaking his windows could not have astonished the prince more.

"M. de Monsoreau!" cried he, with an uneasiness he could not hide.

"Myself, monseigneur," replied he, trying to repress his emotion, but the effort he made over himself was so violent that his legs failed him, and he fell on to a chair which stood near.

"But you will kill yourself, my dear friend," said the duke; "you are so pale, you look as though you were going to faint."

"Oh, no; what I have to say to your highness is of too much importance; I may faint afterward."

"Speak, then, my dear comte."

"Not before your people, I suppose."

The duke dismissed every one.

"Your highness has just come in?" said Monsoreau.

"As you see, comte."

"It is very imprudent of your highness to go by night in the streets."

"Who told you I had been in the streets?"

"The dust on your clothes."

"M. de Monsoreau, have you another employment besides that of chief huntsman?"

"Yes, that of spy, monseigneur; all the world follow that calling now, more or less, and I, like the rest."

"And what does this profession bring you, monsieur?"

"Knowledge."

"It is curious."

"Very curious."

"Well, tell me what you have to say?"

"I came for that."

"You permit me to sit down?" said the duke.

"No irony, monseigneur, toward an old and faithful servant, who comes at this hour and in this state to do you a service. If I sat down, on my honor, it was because I could not stand."

"A service! to do me a service?"

"Yes."

"Speak, then."

"Monseigneur, I come on the part of a great prince."

"From the king?"

"No; M. le Duc de Guise."

"Ah! that is quite a different thing. Approach, and speak low."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

HOW M. LE DUC D'ANJOU SIGNED, AND, AFTER HAVING SIGNED, SPOKE.

THERE was a moment's silence. Then the duke said:

"Well, M. le Comte, what have you to say to me from the Duc de Guise?"

"Much, monseigneur."

"They have written to you?"

"No; the duke writes no more since that strange disappearance of Nicholas David. They have come to Paris."

"MM. de Guise are at Paris?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"I have not seen them."

"They are too prudent to expose themselves or your highness to any risk."

"And I was not told!"

"I tell you now."

"What have they come for?"

"They come, monseigneur, to the rendezvous you gave them."

"That I gave them!"

"Doubtless; on the day when your highness was arrested you received a letter from M. de Guise, and replied to it verbally, through me, that they were to come to Paris from the thirty-first of May to the second of June. It is now the thirty-first of May, and if your highness has forgotten them, they have not forgotten you."

Francois grew pale. So many events had passed since, that he had forgotten the rendezvous. "It is true," said he, at length, "but the relations which then existed between us exist no longer."

"If that be so, monseigneur, you would do well to tell them, for I believe they think differently."

"How so?"

"You, perhaps, think yourself free as regards them, but they feel bound to you."

"A snare, my dear comte, in which a man does not let himself be taken twice."

"And where was monseigneur taken in a snare?"

"Where? at the Louvre, mordieu."

"Was it the fault of MM. de Guise?"

"I do not say so, but they never assisted me to escape."

"It would have been difficult; they were flying themselves."

"It is true."

"But when you were in Anjou, did they not charge me to tell you that you could always count on them, as they on you, and that the day you marched on Paris, they would do the same?"

"It is true, but I did not march on Paris."

"You are here."

"Yes; but as my brother's ally."

"Monseigneur will permit me to observe that he is more than the ally of the Guises."

"What then?"

"Their accomplice."

The duke bit his lips.

"And you say they charged you to announce their arrival to me?"

"They did me that honor."

"But they did not tell you the motive of their return?"

"They told me all, knowing me to be the confidant of your highness."

"Then they have projects. What are they?"

"The same always."

"And they think them practicable?"

"They look upon them as certain."

"And these projects have for an aim—"

The duke stopped, not daring to finish.

"To make you king of France; yes, monseigneur."

The duke felt the flush of joy mount to his face.

"But," said he, "is the moment favorable?"

"Your wisdom must decide."

"My wisdom?"

"Yes, the facts cannot be contradicted. The nomination of the king as head of the League was only a comedy, quickly seen through and appreciated. Now the reaction has commenced, and the entire state is rising against the tyranny of the king and his creatures. Sermons are a call to arms, and churches are places where they curse the king, instead of praying to God. The army trembles with impatience; the bourgeois league together; our emissaries bring in nothing but signatures and new adherents to the League. In a word, the king's reign touches on its close. Now, do you renounce your former projects?"

The duke did not reply.

"Monseigneur knows that he may speak frankly to me."

"I think," said the duke, "that considering my brother has no children, that his health is uncertain, and that after him the crown will come naturally to me, there is no reason why I should compromise my name and my dignity in a useless struggle, and try to take, with danger, what will come to me in due course."

"Your highness is in error; your brother's throne will only come to you if you take it. MM. de Guise cannot be kings

themselves, but they will only allow to reign a king of their own making, a king whom they substitute for the reigning one. They count on your highness, but if you refuse, they will seek another."

"And who will dare to seat himself on the throne of Charlemagne?"

"A Bourbon instead of a Valois, monseigneur; a son of St. Louis, instead of a son of St. Louis."

"The king of Navarre?"

"Why not? He is young and brave."

"He is a Huguenot."

"Was he not converted at the St. Bartholomew?"

"Yes, and he abjured afterward."

"Oh, monseigneur, what he did for his wife, he will do again for the crown."

"They think, then, that I will yield my rights without a struggle."

"The case is provided for."

"I will fight."

"They are men of war."

"I will put myself at the head of the League."

"They are the soul of it."

"I will join my brother."

"Your brother will be dead."

"I will call the kings of Europe to my aid."

"They will think twice before making war on a people."

"My party will stand by me."

"Your party, I believe, consists of M. de Bussy and myself."

"Then I am tied."

"Nearly so. You can do nothing without the Guises; with them, everything. Say the word, and you are king."

The duke walked about for a few minutes in great agitation, then stopped, and said, "Go on, count."

"This, then, is the plan. In eight days the Fete Dieu will take place, and the king meditates on that day a great procession to the convents of Paris. There, the guards will remain at the door, the king will stop before each altar, kneel down, and say five paters and five aves."

"I know all that."

"He will go to St. Genevieve—"

"Yes."

"He will enter with a suite of five or six persons, and behind them, the doors will be closed."

"And then—"

"Your highness knows the monks who will do the honors of the abbey to his majesty."

"They will be the same—"

"Who were there when your highness was crowned."

"They will dare to lay hands on the Lord's anointed?"

"Oh! to shave him only."

"They will never dare to do that to a king."

"He will not be a king then."

"How so?"

"Have you never heard of a holy man who preaches sermons and is going to perform miracles?"

"Brother Gorenflot?"

"Just so."

"The one who wished to preach the League with his arquebuse on his shoulder?"

"The same."

"Well! they will conduct the king into his cell; once there, he will be asked to sign his abdication, then, when he has signed, Madame de Montpensier will enter, scissors in hand. She wears them now, hanging to her side; they are charming scissors, made of gold, and admirably chased, to do him honor. You understand the rest. We announce to the people that the king, experiencing a holy repentance for his sins, has announced his intention of never more leaving the convent. If there are any who doubt, M. de Guise holds the army, M. le Cardinal the Church, and M. de Mayenne the bourgeois; and with these three powers you can make the people believe what you like."

"But they will accuse me of violence," said the duke.

"You need not be there."

"They will look on me as a usurper."

"Monseigneur forgets the abdication."

"The king will refuse."

"It seems that Brother Gorenflot is not only clever, but strong."

"The plan is then settled?"

"Quite."

"And they do not fear that I shall denounce it?"

"No, monseigneur; for in that case, they have another, not less sure."

"Ah!"——"Yes."

"And this one?"

"I do not know; they thought me too much your friend to trust me with it."

"Well, I yield, count. What must I do?"

"Approve."

"I do."

"Words are not enough."

"What then?"

"Writing."

"It is a folly to suppose I will ever consent to that."

"And why not?"

"If the conspiracy fail—"

"It is just in case it should that they ask for your signature."

"Then they wish to shelter themselves behind my name?"

"Just so."

"Then I refuse."

"You cannot."

"I cannot refuse?"

"No."

"Are you mad?"

"To refuse is to betray."

"Let them think as they like; at all events I will choose my own danger."

"Monseigneur, you choose badly."

"I will risk it," cried Francois, endeavoring to keep firm.

"For your own interest I advise you not to do so."

"But I shall compromise myself by signing."

"In refusing, you assassinate yourself."

Francois shuddered.

"They would dare?" said he.

"They would dare anything, monseigneur. The conspirators have gone so far, that they must succeed at any cost."

The duke, with his usual indecision, felt terribly perplexed.

"I will sign," said he, at last.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"No, monseigneur; if you sign, it must be at once."

"But M. de Guise must draw up the agreement."

"It is already drawn—here it is;" and Monsoreau drew a paper from his pocket: it was a full adhesion to the scheme. The duke read it through, growing more and more pale as he did so.

"Here is the pen, monseigneur."

"Then I must sign?"

"If you wish to do so; no one forces you."

"Yes, they do, since they menace me with assassination."

"I do not menace you, monseigneur—I only warn you."

"Give me the pen."

And, snatching it eagerly, he signed the paper. Monsoreau watched him with an eye full of hatred and hope, and no sooner had the duke finished than, exclaiming "Ah!" he seized the paper, buttoned it into his doublet, and wrapped his cloak over it.

Francois looked at him with astonishment, for a flash of ferocious joy played over his face.

"And now, monseigneur, be prudent," said he.——"How so?"

"Do not run about the streets with Aurilly, as you did just now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, this evening, you pursued with your love a woman whom her husband adores, and whom he is jealous of, enough to kill any one who approaches her without permission."

"Is it of you and your wife that you are speaking?"

"Yes, monseigneur. I have married Diana de Meridor; she is mine, and no one shall have her while I live—not even a prince; I swear it by my name and on this poniard!" and he touched with his poniard the breast of the prince, who started back.

"Monsieur, you menace me!" cried Francois, pale with rage.

"No, monseigneur; once more, I say, I only warn you."

"Of what?"

"That no one shall make love to my wife."

"And I warn you that you are too late, and that some one makes love to her already."

Monsoreau uttered a terrible cry. "Is it you?" cried he.

"You are mad, count!"

"No, I am not; prove your words."

"Who was hidden this evening, twenty steps from your door, with a musket?"

"I."

"Well, comte, during that time there was a man with your wife."

"You saw him go in?"

"I saw him come out."

"By the door?"

"No, by the window."

"Did you recognize him?"

"Yes."

"Name him, monseigneur, or I do not answer for myself."

The duke half smiled.

"M. le Comte," said he, "on my faith as a prince, on my soul, within a week I will tell you his name."

"You swear it?"

"I swear it."

"Well, monseigneur, you have a week; but—" said he, touching the paper in his breast.

"Come back in eight days."

"Good! in eight days I shall have regained all my strength, ready for vengeance."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

A PROMENADE AT THE TOURNELLES.

In course of time the Angevin gentlemen had returned to Paris, although not with much confidence. They knew too well the king, his brother, and mother, to hope that all would terminate in a family embrace. They returned, therefore, timidly, and glided into the town armed to the teeth, ready to fire on the least suspicion, and drew their swords fifty times before the Hotel d'Anjou on harmless bourgeois, who were guilty of no crime but of looking at them. They presented themselves at the Louvre, magnificently dressed in silk, velvet, and embroidery. Henri III. would not receive them; they waited vainly in the gallery. It was MM. Quelus, Maugiron, Schomberg, and D'Epernon who came to announce this news to them, with great politeness, and expressing all the regrets in the world.

"Ah, gentlemen," said Antragues, "the news is sad, but, coming from your mouths, it loses half its bitterness."

"Gentlemen," said Schomberg, "you are the flower of grace and courtesy. Would it please you to change the reception which you have missed into a little promenade?"

"Ah! gentlemen, we were about to propose it."

"Where shall we go?" said Quelus.

"I know a charming place near the Bastille," said Schomberg.

"We follow you, go on."

Then the eight gentlemen went out, arm in arm, talking gayly on different subjects, until Quelus said, "Here is a solitary place, with a good footing."

"Ma foi, yes."

"Well! we thought that you would one day accompany us here to meet M. de Bussy, who has invited us all here."

"It is true," said Bussy.

"Do you accept?" said Maugiron.

"Certainly; we rejoice at such an honor."

"That is well," said Schomberg; "shall we each choose an opponent?"

"No," said Bussy, "that is not fair; let us trust to chance, and the first one that is free can join the others."

"Let us draw lots, then," said Quelus.

"One moment," said Bussy, "first let us settle the rules of the game."

"They are simple; we will fight till death ensues!"

"Yes, but how?"

"With sword and dagger."

"On foot?"

"Oh, yes! on horseback one's movements are not so free."

"Then, on foot."

"What day?"

"The soonest possible."

"No," said D'Epernon, "I have a thousand things to settle and a will to make; I would rather wait five or six days."

"So be it."

"Then draw lots."

"One moment! divide the ground into four compartments, each for a pair."

"Well said."

"I propose for number one, the long square between the chestnuts; it is a fine place."

"Agreed."

"But the sun? one would be turned to the east."

"No," said Bussy, "that is not fair;" and he proposed a new position, which was agreed to.

Schomberg and Ribeirac came first. They were the first pair; Quelus and Antragues the second; then Livarot and Maugiron the third. D'Epernon, who saw himself left to Bussy, grew very pale.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bussy, "until the day of the combat, let us be friends. Will you accept a dinner at the Hotel Bussy?"

All agreed, and returned with Bussy to his hotel, where a sumptuous banquet united them till morning.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

IN WHICH CHICOT SLEEPS.

THE movements of the young men had been remarked by the king and Chicot. The king walked up and down, waiting impatiently for his friends to return; but Chicot followed them at a distance, and saw enough to be satisfied of their intentions. When he returned to the house he found the king, walking up and down, muttering.

"Ah! my dear friend! do you know what has become of them?" cried Henri.

"Whom? your minions?"

"Alas! yes, my poor friends."

"They must lie very low by this time."

"Have they been killed?" cried Henri; are they dead?"

"Dead, I fear—"

"And you laugh, wretch?"

"Oh! my son, dead drunk."

"Oh! Chicot, how you terrified me. But why do you calumniate these gentlemen?"

"On the contrary, I praise them."

"Be serious, I beg; do you know that they went out with the Angevins?"

"Of course I know it."

"What was the result?"

"What I tell you; that they are dead drunk."

"But Bussy!"

"He is intoxicating them; he is a dangerous man."

"Chicot, for pity's sake—"

"Yes; Bussy has given a dinner to your friends; how do you like that?"

"Impossible! They are sworn enemies."

"Have you good legs?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will you go to the river?"

"I would go to the end of the world to see such a thing."

"Well! go only to the Hôtel Bussy."

"Will you accompany me?"

"Thank you, I have just come from there."

"But—"

"Oh! no; I, who have seen, do not need to be convinced. Go, my son, go. You disquiet yourself about your friends; you first pity them as if they were dead, and when you hear they are not dead, you are uneasy still—"

"You are intolerable, M. Chicot."

"Would you have preferred that they should each have had seven or eight wounds by a rapier?"

"I should like to be able to depend on my friends."

"Oh! ventre de biche, depend upon me; I am here, my son, only feed me. I want pheasant and truffles."

Henri and his only friend went to bed early, the king still sighing.

The next day, at the petite levée of the king, MM. Quelus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and D'Epernon presented themselves. Chicot still slept. The king jumped from his bed in a fury, and tearing off the perfumed mask from his face, cried, "Go out from here."

The young men looked at each other in wonder.

"But, sire, we wished to say to your majesty—"

"That you are no longer drunk, I suppose."

Chicot opened his eyes.

"Your majesty is in error," said Quelus, gravely.

"And yet I have not drunk the wine of Anjou."

"Oh! I understand," said Quelus, smiling.

"YOUR HIGHNESS MISTAKES YOUR WAY," SAID HE.—*Page* 424.

"What?"

"If your majesty will remain alone with us, we will tell you."

"I hate drunkards and traitors."

"Sire," cried three of the gentlemen.

"Patience, gentlemen," said Quelus, "his majesty has slept badly, and had unpleasant dreams. A few words will set all right."

"Speak then, but be brief."

"It is possible, sire, but difficult."

"Yes; one turns long round certain accusations."

"No, sire, we go straight to it," replied Quelus, looking again at Chicot and the usher, as though to reiterate his request that they might be left alone. The king signed to the usher to leave the room, but Chicot said, "Never mind me, I sleep like a top," and closing his eyes again, he began to snore with all his strength.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

WHERE CHICOT WAKES.

"YOUR majesty," said Quelus, "knows only half the business, and that the least interesting half. Assuredly, we have all dined with M. de Bussy, and to the honor of his cook, be it said, dined well. There was, above all, a certain wine from Austria or Hungary, which really appeared to me marvelous. But during the repast, or rather after it, we had the most serious and interesting conversation concerning your majesty's affairs."

"You make the exordium very long."

"How talkative you are, Valois!" cried Chicot.

"Oh! oh! M. Gascon," said Henri, "if you do not sleep, you must leave the room."

"Pardieu, it is you who keep me from sleeping, your tongue clacks so fast."

Quelus, seeing it was impossible to speak seriously, shrugged his shoulders, and rose in anger.

"We were speaking of grave matters," said he.

"Grave matters?"

"Yes," said D'Epernon, "if the lives of eight brave gentlemen are worth the trouble of your majesty's attention."

"What does it mean, my son?" said Henri, placing his hand on Quelus's shoulder.

"Well, sire, the result of our conversation was, that royalty is menaced—weakened, that is to say, that all the world is conspiring against you. Sire, you are a great king, but you have no horizon before you; the nobility have raised so many barriers before your eyes, that you can see nothing, if it be not the still higher barriers that the people have raised. When, sire, in battle one battalion places itself like a menacing wall before another, what happens? Cowards look behind them, and seeing an open space, they fly; the brave lower their heads and rush on."

"Well, then forward!" cried the king, "mordieu! am I not the first gentleman in my kingdom? Were they not great battles that I fought in my youth? Forward, then, gentlemen, and I will take the lead; it is my custom in the melée."

"Oh! yes, sire," cried the young men, with one voice.

"And," said Quelus, "against these ramparts which are closing round your majesty, four men will march, sure to be applauded by you, and glorified by posterity."

"What do you mean, Quelus?" cried the king, with eyes in which joy was tempered by solicitude; "who are these four men?"

"I, and these other gentlemen," replied Quelus, with pride; "we devote ourselves, sire."

"To what?"

"To your safety."

"Against whom?"

"Against your enemies."

"Private enmities of young men?"

"Oh! sire, that is the expression of vulgar prejudice; speak like a king, sire, not like a bourgeois. Do not profess to believe that Maugiron detests Antragues, that Schomberg dislikes Livarot, that D'Epernon is jealous of Bussy, and that I hate Ribeirac. Oh! no. They are all young, and agreeable, and might love each other like brothers: it is not, therefore, a rivalry between man and man, which places the swords in our hands; it is the quarrel of France with Anjou, the

dispute as to the rights of the populace against the prerogatives of the king. We present ourselves as champions of royalty in those lists, where we shall be met by the champions of the League, and we came to say, 'Bless us, sire, smile on those who are going to die for you.' Your blessing will, perhaps, give us the victory, your smile will make us die happy."

Henri, overcome with emotion, opened his arms to Quelus and the others. He united them in his heart; and it was not a spectacle without interest, a picture without expression, but a scene in which manly courage was allied to softer emotions, sanctified by devotion. Chicot looked on, and his face, ordinarily indifferent or sarcastic, was not the least noble and eloquent of the six.

"Ah!" cried the king, "I am proud to-day, not of being king of France, but of being your friend; at the same time, as I know my own interests best, I will not accept a sacrifice, of which the result will deliver me up, if you fall, into the hands of my enemies. France is enough to make war on Anjou; I know my brother, the Guises, and the League, and have often conquered more dangerous foes."

"But, sire, soldiers do not reason thus, they never take ill luck into their calculations."

"Pardon me, Maugiron; a soldier may act blindly, but the captain reflects."

"Reflect, then, sire, and let us act, who are only soldiers," said Schomberg: "besides, I know no ill luck; I am always successful."

"Friend, friend," said the king, sadly, "I wish I could say as much. It is true, you are but twenty."

"Sire," said Quelus, "on what day shall we meet MM. Bussy, Livarot, Antragues and Riberiac?"

"Never; I forbid it absolutely."

"Sire, excuse us, the rendezvous was arranged before the dinner, words were said which cannot be retracted."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Henri, "the king absolves from oaths and promises by saying, 'I will or I will not,' for the king is all-powerful. Tell these gentlemen, therefore, that I have menaced you with all my anger if you come to blows; and that you may not doubt it yourselves, I swear to exile you, if—"

"Stop! sire; do not swear; because, if for such a cause we have merited your anger, and this anger shows itself by exiling us, we will go into exile with joy, because, being no longer on your majesty's territories we can then keep our promises, and meet our adversaries."

"If these gentlemen approach you within range of an arquebuse, I will throw them all into the Bastille."

"Sire, if you do so we will all go barefooted, and with cords round our necks, to M. Testu, the governor, and pray to be incarcerated with them."

"I will have them beheaded, then; I am king, I hope."

"We will cut our throats at the foot of their scaffold."

Henri kept silent for a long time; then, raising his eyes, said, "God will surely bless a cause defended by such noble hearts."

"Yes, they are noble hearts," said Chicot, rising; "do what they wish, and fix a day for their meeting. It is your duty, my son."

"Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" murmured Henri.

"Sire, we pray you," cried all the four gentlemen, bending their knees.

"Well! so be it. Let us trust that God will give us the victory. But let us prepare for the conflict in a Christian manner. If I had time, I would send all your swords to Rome, that the pope might bless them. But we have the shrine of St. Genevieve, which contains most precious relics: let us fast, and do penance, and keep holy the great day of the Fete Dieu, and then the next day—"

"Ah! sire, thanks; that is in eight days!" cried the young men.

And they seized the hands of the king, who embraced them all once more, and, going into his oratory, melted into tears.

"Our cartel is ready," said Quelus, "we have but to add the day and hour. Write, Maugiron, the day after the Fete Dieu. Here is a table."

"It is done," said Maugiron, "now who will carry the letter?"

"I will, if you please," said Chicot, approaching, "but I wish to give you a piece of advice. His majesty speaks of fasts and macerations. That is all very well after the combat, but before, I prefer good nourishment, generous wine, and eight hours' sleep every night."

"Bravo, Chicot!"

"Adieu, my little lions," replied the Gascon, "I go to the Hotel Bussy." He went three steps and returned, and said, "Apropos, do not quit the king during the Fete Dieu; do not go to the country, any of you, but stay by the Louvre. Now, I will do your commission."

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE FETE DIEU.

DURING these eight days events were preparing themselves, as a tempest gathers in the heavens during the calm days of summer. Monsoreau had an attack of fever for twenty-four hours, then he rallied, and began to watch, himself; but as he discovered no one, he became more than ever convinced of the hypocrisy of the Duc d'Anjou, and of his bad intentions with regard to Diana.

Bussy did not discontinue his visits by day, but, warned by Remy of this constant watchfulness, came no more at night to the window.

Chicot divided his time between the king, whom he watched like a child, and his friend Gorenflot, whom he had persuaded to return to his convent. He passed hours with him in his cell, always bringing with him large bottles in his pocket, and the report began to be spread that Gorenflot had nearly persuaded him to turn monk.

As for the king, he gave constant lessons in fencing to his friends, teaching them new thrusts, and, above all, exercising D'Epernon, to whom fate had given so skillful an adversary that he was visibly preoccupied by it.

Any one walking in the streets of Paris at certain hours might have met the strange monks, of whom our first chapters furnished some description, and who resembled troopers more than monks. Then, to complete the picture, we must add that the Hotel de Guise had become at once mysterious and turbulent, the most peopled within and the most deserted without that can be imagined; that meetings were held every night in the great hall, and with all the blinds and windows hermetically closed, and that these meetings were preceded by dinners, to which none but men were invited, and which were presided over by Madame de Montpensier. Of all these meetings, however, important though they were, the police suspected nothing. On the morning of the great day, the weather was superb, and the flowers which filled the streets sent their perfumes through the air. Chicot, who for the last fortnight had slept in the king's room, woke him early; no one had yet entered the royal chamber.

"Oh, Chicot!" cried the king, "you have woke me from one of the sweetest dreams I ever had in my life."

"What was it, my son?"

"I dreamed that Quelus had run Antragues through the body, and was swimming in the blood of his adversary. Let us go, and pray that my dream may be realized. Call, Chicot, call."

"What do you want?"

"My hair-cloth and my scourge."

"Would you not prefer a good breakfast?"

"Pagan, would you go to hear mass on the Fete Dieu with a full stomach?"

"Even so."

"Call, Chicot."

"Patience; it is scarcely eight o'clock, and you will have plenty of time to scourge yourself. Let us talk first. Converse with your friend; you will not repent it, Valois, on the faith of a Chicot."

"Well, talk; but be quick."

"How shall we divide our day, my son?"

"Into three parts."

"In honor of the Trinity; very well, let me hear these three parts."

"First, mass at St. Germain l'Auxerrois."

"Well?"

"Return to the Louvre, for a collation."

"Very good."

"Then, a procession of penitents through the streets, stopping at the principal convents of Paris, beginning at the Jacobins and finishing at St. Genevieve, where I have promised the prior to stay till to-morrow in the cell of a saint, who will pray for the success of our arms."

"I know him."

"The saint?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"So much the better; you shall accompany me, and we will pray together."

"Yes; make yourself easy."

"Then dress yourself, and come."

"Wait a little."

"What for?"

"I have more to ask."

"Be quick, then, for time passes."

"What is the court to do?"

"Follow me."

"And your brother?"

"Will accompany me."

"Your guard?"

"The French guard wait for me at the Louvre, and the Swiss at the door of the abbey."

"That will do; now I know all."

"Then I may call?"

"Yes."

Henri struck on his gong.

"The ceremony will be magnificent," said Chicot.

"God will accept our homage, I hope."

"But tell me, Henri, before any one comes in, have you nothing else to say to me?"

"No, I have given you all the details."

"Have you settled to sleep at St. Genevieve?"

"Doubtless."

"Well, my son, I do not like that part of the programme."

"How so?"

"When we have dined I will tell you another plan that has occurred to me."

"Well, I consent."

"Whether you consent or not, it will be all the same thing."

"What do you mean?"

"Hush! here are your valets."

As he spoke, the ushers opened the door, and the barber, perfumer, and valet of the king entered, and commenced to execute upon his majesty one of those toilets which we have described elsewhere. When the king was dressing, the Duc d'Anjou was announced. He was accompanied by M. de Monsoreau, D'Epernon, and Aurilly. Henri, at the sight of Monsoreau, still pale and looking more frightful than ever, could not repress a movement of surprise.

"You have been wounded, comte, have you not?" said he.

"Yes, sire."

"At the chase, they told me."

"Yes, sire."

"But you are better now?"

"I am well."

"Sire," said the duke, "would it please you that, after our devotions, M. de Monsoreau should go and prepare a chase for us in the woods of Compiègne?"

"But do you not know that to-morrow—"

He was going to say, "Four of your friends are to fight four of mine;" but he stopped, for he remembered that it was a secret.

"I know nothing," said the duke; "but if your majesty will inform me—"

"I meant that, as I am to pass the night at the Abbey of St. Genevieve, I should perhaps not be ready for to-morrow; but let the count go; if it be not to-morrow, it shall be the day after."

"You hear?" said the duke to Monsoreau.——"Yes, monseigneur."

At this moment Quelus and Schomberg entered. The king received them with open arms.

Monsoreau said softly to the duke, "You exile me, monseigneur."

"Is it not your duty to prepare the chase for the king?"

"I understand—this is the last of the eight days fixed by your highness, and you prefer sending me to Compiègne to keeping your promise."

"No, on the contrary; I keep my promise."

"Explain yourself."

"Your departure will be publicly known."

"Well?"

"Well, do not go, but hide near your house; then, believing you gone, the man you wish to know will come; the rest concerns yourself: I engage for no more."

"Ah! if that be so—"

"You have my word."

"I have better than that, I have your signature."

"Oh, yes, mordieu! I know that."

Aurilly touched D'Epernon's arm and said, "It is done; Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

"Not fight!"

"I answer for it."

"Who will prevent it?"

"Never mind that."

"If it be so, my dear sorcerer, there are one thousand crowns for you."

"Gentlemen," said the king, who had finished his toilet, "to St. Germain l'Auxerrois."

"And from there to St. Genevieve?" asked the duke.

"Certainly," replied Henri, passing into the gallery where all his court were waiting for him.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

WHICH WILL ELUCIDATE THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER.

THE evening before, M. de Monsoreau had returned to his home from the Hotel Guise, and had found Bussy there. Then, in his friendship for this brave gentleman, he had taken him aside and said:

"Will you permit me to give you a piece of advice?"

"Pray do."

"If I were you, I should leave Paris to-morrow."

"I! and why so?"

"All that I can tell you is, that your absence may save you from great embarrassment."

"How so?"

"Are you ignorant of what is to take place to-morrow?"

"Completely."

"On your honor?"

"On my word as a gentleman."

"M. d'Anjou has confided nothing to you?"

"Nothing; M. d'Anjou confides nothing to me beyond what all the world knows."

"Well! I, who am not the Duc d'Anjou, who love my friends for their own sakes, and not for mine, I will tell you, my dear count, that he is preparing for grave events to-morrow, and that the parties of Guise and Anjou meditate a stroke which may end in the fall of the king."

Bussy looked at M. de Monsoreau with suspicion, but his whole manner expressed so much sincerity that it was impossible to doubt him.

"Count," replied he, "my sword belongs to the Duc d'Anjou. The king, against whom I have done nothing, hates me, and has never let slip an occasion of doing or saying something wounding to me; and to-morrow I tell you—but you alone, remember—I am about to risk my life to humiliate Henri de Valois in the person of his favorites."

"Then you are resolved to risk all the consequences of your adherence to the duke?"

"Yes."

"You know where it may lead you?"

"I know where I will stop; whatever complaints I have against the king, I will never lift a hand against him; but I will let others do what they like, and I will follow M. d'Anjou to protect him in case of need."

"My dear comte," said Monsoreau, "the Duc d'Anjou is perfidious and a traitor; a coward, capable, from jealousy or fear, of sacrificing his most faithful servant—his most devoted friend; abandon him, take a friend's counsel, pass the day in your little house at Vincennes, go where you like, except to the procession of the Fete Dieu."

"But why do you follow the duke yourself?"

"For reasons which concern my honor. I have need of him for a little while longer."

"Well! that is like me; for things which concern my honor I must follow the duke."

The Comte de Monsoreau pressed his hand, and they parted.

The next morning Monsoreau announced to his wife his approaching departure for Compiègne, and gave all the necessary orders. Diana heard the news with joy. She knew from her husband of the duel which was arranged between Bussy and D'Epernon, but had no fear for the result, and looked forward to it with pride. Bussy had presented himself in the morning to the Duc d'Anjou, who, seeing him so frank, loyal, and devoted, felt some remorse; but two things combated this return of good feeling—firstly, the great empire Bussy had over him, as every powerful mind has over a weak one, and which annoyed him; and, secondly, the love of Bussy for Diana, which awoke all the tortures of jealousy in his heart. Monsoreau, it was true, inspired him with equal dislike and fear, but he thought, "Either Bussy will accompany me and aid my triumph, and then if I triumph, I do not care for Monsoreau, or Bussy will abandon me, and then I owe him nothing, and I will abandon him in return."

When they were in the church, the duke saw Remy enter, and going up to his master, slide a note into his hand.

"It is from her," thought he; "she sends him word that her husband is leaving Paris."

Bussy put the note into his hat, opened, and read it; and the prince saw his face radiant with joy and love.

The duke looked round; if Monsoreau had been there, perhaps he would not have had patience to wait till the evening to denounce Bussy.

The mass over, they returned to the Louvre, where a collation waited for the king in his room, and for his gentlemen in the gallery. On entering the Louvre, Bussy approached the duke.

"Pardon, monseigneur," said he, "but can I say two words to you?"

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Very much so."

"Will it not do during the procession? we shall walk side by side."

"Monseigneur must excuse me, but what I wished to ask is, that I need not accompany you."

"Why so?"

"Monseigneur, to-morrow is a great day, and I would wish to retire to-day to my little house at Vincennes."

"Then you do not join the procession with the king and court?"

"No, monseigneur, if you will excuse me."

"Will you not rejoin me at St. Genevieve?"

"Monseigneur, I wish to have the whole day to myself."

"But if anything should occur when I have need of my friends?"

"As monseigneur would only want me to draw my sword against my king, it is a double reason for excusing myself," replied Bussy; "my sword is engaged against M. d'Epernon."

Monsoreau had told the duke the night before that he might reckon on Bussy; this change, therefore, must have been occasioned by Diana's note.

"Then," said the duke, "you abandon your chief and master?"

"Monseigneur, he who is about to risk his life in a bloody duel, as ours will be, has but one master, and it is to Him my last devotions will be paid."

"You know that I am playing for a throne, and you leave me."

"Monseigneur, I have worked enough for you; I will work again to-morrow, do not ask me for more than my life."

"It is well!" said the duke, in a hollow voice, "you are free; go, M. de Bussy."

Bussy, without caring for the prince's evident anger, ran down the staircase of the Louvre, and went rapidly to his own house.

The duke called Aurilly. "Well! he has condemned himself," said he.

"Does he not follow you?"——"No."

"He goes to the rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"Then it is for this evening?"

"It is."

"Is M. de Monsoreau warned?"

"Of the rendezvous—yes; but not yet of the man."

"Then you have decided to sacrifice the count?"

"I have determined to revenge myself; I fear now but one thing."

"What is that?"

"That Monsoreau will trust to his strength, and that Bussy will escape him."

"Reassure yourself, monseigneur."

"Why?"

"Is M. de Bussy irrevocably condemned?"

"Yes, mordieu! A man who dictates to me—who takes away from me her whom I was seeking for—who is a sort of lion, of whom I am less the master than the keeper—yes, Aurilly, he is condemned without mercy."

"Well, then, be easy, for if he escape Monsoreau, he will not escape from another."

"And who is that?"

"Does your highness order me to name him?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is M. d'Epernon."

"D'Epernon! who was to fight him tomorrow?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"How is that?"

Aurilly was about to reply, when the duke was summoned; for the king was at table, and had sent for his brother.

"You shall tell me during the procession," said the duke.

We will now tell our readers what had passed between Aurilly and D'Epernon. They had long known each other, for Aurilly had taught D'Epernon to play on the lute, and, as he was fond of music, they were often together. He called upon Aurilly to tell him of his approaching duel, which disquieted him not a little. Bravery was never one of D'Epernon's prominent qualities, and he looked on a duel with Bussy as certain death. When Aurilly heard it, he told D'Epernon that Bussy practiced fencing every morning with an artist, lately arrived, who was said to have borrowed from all nations their best points, until he had become perfect. During this recital, D'Epernon grew livid with terror.

"Ah! I am doomed," said he.

"Well?"

"But it is absurd to go out with a man who is sure to kill me."

"You should have thought of that before making the engagement."

"Peste! I will break the engagement. He is a fool who gives up his life willingly at twenty-five. But, now I think of it—"

"Well."

"M. de Bussy is sure to kill me."

"I do not doubt it."

"Then it will not be a duel, but an assassination."

"Perhaps so."

"And if it be, it is lawful to prevent an assassination by—"

"By?"——"A murder."

"Doubtless."

"What prevents me, since he wishes to kill me, from killing him first?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! nothing; I thought of that myself."

"It is only natural."

"Very natural."

"Only, instead of killing him with my own hands, I will leave it to others."

"That is to say, you will hire assassins?"

"Ma foi! yes, like M. de Guise for St. Megrim."

"It will cost you dear."

"I will give three thousand crowns."

"You will only get six men for that, when they know who they have to deal with."

"Are not six enough?"

"M. de Bussy would kill four before they touched him. Do you remember the fight in the Rue St. Antoine?"

"I will give six thousand; if I do the thing, I will take care he does not escape."

"Have you your men?"

"Oh, there are plenty of unoccupied men—soldiers of fortune."

"Very well; but take care."

"Of what?"

"If they fail they will denounce you."

"I have the king to protect me."

"That will not hinder M. de Bussy from killing you."

"That is true."

"Should you like an auxiliary?"

"I should like anything which would aid me to get rid of him."

"Well, a certain enemy of your enemy is jealous."

"And he is now laying a snare for him?"

"Ah!"

"Well?"

"But he wants money; with your six thousand crowns he will take care of your affair as well as his own. You do not wish the honor of the thing to be yours, I suppose?"

"Mon Dieu! no; I only ask to remain in obscurity."

"Send your men, and he will use them."

"But I must know who it is."

"I will show you in the morning."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre."

"Then he is noble?"

"Yes."

"Aurilly, you shall have the six thousand crowns."

"Then it is settled?"

"Irrevocably."

"At the Louvre, then?"

"Yes, at the Louvre."

We have seen in the preceding chapter how Aurilly said to D'Epernon, "Be easy, Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE PROCESSION.

As soon as the collation was over, the king had entered his room with Chicot, to put on his penitent's robe, and had come out an instant after, with bare feet, a cord round his waist, and his hood over his face; the courtiers had made the same toilet. The weather was magnificent, and the pavements were strewn with flowers; an immense crowd lined the roads to the four places where the king was to stop. The clergy of St. Germain led the procession, and the archbishop of Paris followed, carrying the holy sacrament; between them walked young boys, shaking censers, and young girls scattering roses. Then came the king, followed by his four friends, barefooted and frocked like himself.

The Duc d'Anjou followed in his ordinary dress, accompanied by his Angevins. Next came the principal courtiers, and then the bourgeois. It was one o'clock when they left the Louvre. Crillon and the French guards were about to follow, but the king signed them to remain. It was near six in the evening before they arrived before the old abbey, where they saw the prior and the monks drawn up on the threshold to wait for his majesty. The Duc d'Anjou, a little before, had pleaded great fatigue, and had asked leave to retire to his hotel, which had been granted to him. His gentlemen had retired with him, as if to proclaim that they followed the duke and not the king, besides which, they did not wish to fatigue themselves before the morrow. At the door of the abbey the king dismissed his four favorites, that they also might take some repose. The archbishop also, who had eaten nothing since morning, was dropping with fatigue, so the king took pity on him, and on the other priests, and dismissed them all. Then, turning to the prior, Joseph Foulon, "Here I am, my father," said he; "I come, sinner as I am, to seek repose in your solitude."

The prior bowed, and the royal penitent mounted the steps of the abbey, striking his breast at each step, and the door was immediately closed behind him.

"We will first," said the prior, "conduct your majesty into the crypt, which we have ornamented in our best manner to do honor to the king of heaven and earth."

No sooner had the king passed through the somber arcade, lined with monks, and turned the corner which led to the chapel, than twenty hoods were thrown into the air, and eyes were seen brilliant with joy and triumph. Certainly, they were not monkish or peaceful faces displayed, but bristling mustaches and embrowned skins, many scarred by wounds, and by the side of the proudest of all, who displayed the most celebrated scar, stood a woman covered with a frock, and looking triumphant and happy. This woman, shaking a pair of golden scissors which hung by her side, cried:

"Ah! my brothers, at last we have the Valois!"

"Ma foi! sister, I believe so."

"Not yet," murmured the cardinal.

"How so?"

"Shall we have enough bourgeois guards to make head against Crillon and his guards?"

"We have better than bourgeois guards; and, believe me, there will not be a musket-shot exchanged."

"How so?" said the duchess. "I should have liked a little disturbance."

"Well, sister, you will be deprived of it. When the king is taken he will cry out, but no one will answer; then, by persuasion or by violence, but without showing ourselves, we shall make him sign his abdication. The news will soon spread through the city, and dispose in our favor both the bourgeois and the troops."

"The plan is good, and cannot fail," said the duchess.

"It is rather brutal," said the Duc de Guise; "besides which, the king will refuse to sign the abdication. He is brave, and will rather die."

"Let him die, then."

"Not so," replied the duke, firmly. "I will mount the throne of a prince who abdicates and is despised, but not of an assassinated man who is pitied. Besides, in your plans you forget M. le Duc d'Anjou, who will claim the crown."

"Let him claim, mordieu!" said Mayenne; "he shall be comprised in his brother's act of abdication. He is in connection with the Huguenots, and is unworthy to reign."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Pardieu! did he not escape from the Louvre by the aid of the king of Navarre?"——"Well?"

"Then another clause in favor of our house shall follow; this clause shall make you lieutenant-general of the kingdom, from which to the throne is only a step."

"Yes, yes," said the cardinal, "all that is settled; but it is probable that the French guards, to make sure that the abdication is a genuine one, and above all, a voluntary one, will insist upon seeing the king, and will force the gates of the abbey if they are not admitted. Crillon does not understand joking, and he is just the man to say to the king, 'Sire, your life is in danger; but, before everything, let us save our honor.'"

"The general has taken his precautions. If it be necessary to sustain a siege, we have here eighty gentlemen, and I have distributed arms to a hundred monks. We could hold out for a month against the army; besides, in case of danger, we have the cave to fly to with our prey."

"What is the Duc d'Anjou doing?"

"In the hour of danger he has failed, as usual. He has gone home, no doubt, waiting for news of us, through Bussy or Monsoreau."

"Mon Dieu! he should have been here; not at home."

"You are wrong, brother," said the cardinal; "the people and the nobles would have seen in it a snare to entrap the family. As you said just now, we must, above all things, avoid playing the part of usurper. We must inherit. By leaving the Duc d'Anjou free, and the queen-mother independent, no one will have anything to accuse us of. If we acted otherwise, we should have against us Bussy, and a hundred other dangerous swords."——"Bah! Bussy is going to fight against the king's minions."

"Pardieu! he will kill them, and then he will join us," said the Duc de Guise; "he is a superior man, and one whom I much esteem, and I will make him general of the army in Italy, where war is sure to break out."

"And I," said the duchess, "if I become a widow, will marry him."

"Who is near the king?" asked the duke.

"The prior and Brother Gorenflot."

"Is he in the cell?"

"Oh, no! he will look first at the crypt and the relics."

At this moment a bell sounded.

"The king is returning," said the Duc de Guise; "let us become monks again." And immediately the hoods covered ardent eyes and speaking scars, and twenty or thirty monks, conducted by the three brothers, went toward the crypt.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

CHICOT THE FIRST.

THE king visited the crypt, kissed the relics—often striking his breast, and mur-

muring the most doleful psalms. At last the prior said, "Sire, will it please you now to depose your earthly crown at the feet of the eternal King?"

"Let us go!" said the king.

They arrived at the cell, on the threshhold of which stood Gorenflot, his eyes brilliant as carbuncles.

Henri entered. "Hic portus salutis!" murmured he.

"Yes," replied Foulon.

"Leave us!" said Gorenflot, with a majestic gesture; and immediately the door shut, and they were left alone.

"Here you are, then, Herod! pagan! Nebuchadnezzar!" cried Gorenflot, suddenly.

"Is it to me you speak, my brother?" cried the king, in surprise.

"Yes, to you. Can one accuse you of anything so bad, that it is not true?"

"My brother!"

"Bah! you have no brother here. I have long been meditating a discourse, and now you shall have it. I divide it into three heads. First, you are a tyrant; second, you are a satyr; third, you are dethroned."

"Dethroned!"

"Neither more nor less. This abbey is not like Poland, and you cannot fly."

"Ah! a snare!"

"Oh, Valois, learn that a king is but a man."

"You are violent, my brother."

"Pardieu! do you think we imprison you to flatter you?"

"You abuse your religious calling."

"There is no religion."

"Oh, you are a saint, and say such things!"

"I have said it."

"You speak dreadfully, my brother."

"Come, no preaching; are you ready?"

"To do what?"

"To resign your crown; I am charged to demand it of you."

"You are committing a mortal sin."

"Oh! I have right of absolution, and I absolve myself in advance. Come, renounce, Brother Valois."

"Renounce what?"

"The throne of France."

"Rather death!"

"Oh! then you shall die! Here is the prior returning. Decide!"

"I have my guards—my friends; they will defend me."

"Yes, but you will be killed first."

"Leave me at least a little time for reflection."——"Not an instant!"

"Your zeal carries you away, brother," said the prior, opening the door; and saying to the king, "Your request is granted," he shut it again.

Henri fell into a profound reverie. "I accept the sacrifice," he said, after the lapse of ten minutes.

"It is done—he accepts!" cried Gorenflot.

The king heard a murmur of joy and surprise.

"Read him the act," said a voice, and a monk passed a paper to Gorenflot.

Gorenflot read it to the king, who listened with his head buried in his hands.

"If I refuse to sign?" cried he, shedding tears.

"It will be doubly your ruin," said the Duc de Guise, from under his hood. "Look on yourself as dead to the world, and do not force your subjects to shed the blood of a man who has been their king."

"I will not be forced."

"I feared so," said the duke to his sister. Then, turning to his brother, "Let every one arm and prepare," said he.

"For what?" cried the king, in a miserable tone.

"For anything."

The king's despair redoubled.

"Corbleu!" cried Gorenflot, "I hated you before, Valois, but now I despise you! Sign, or you shall perish by my hand!"

"Have patience," said the king; "let me pray to my divine Master for resignation."

"He wishes to reflect again," said Gorenflot.

"Give him till midnight," said the cardinal.

"Thanks, charitable Christian!" cried the king.

"His brain is weak," said the duke; "we serve France by dethroning him."

"I shall have great pleasure in clipping him!" said the duchess.

Suddenly a noise was heard outside, and soon they distinguished blows struck on the door of the abbey, and Mayenne went to see what it was. "My brothers," said he, "there is a troop of armed men outside."

"They have come to seek him," said the duchess.——"The more reason that he should sign quickly."

"Sign, Valois, sign!" roared Gorenflot.

"You gave me till midnight," said the king, piteously.

"Ah! you hoped to be rescued."

"He shall die if he does not sign!" cried the duchess.

Gorenflot offered him the pen. The noise outside redoubled.

"A new troop!" cried a monk; "they are surrounding the abbey!"

"The Swiss," cried Foulon, "are advancing on the right!"

"Well, we will defend ourselves; with such a hostage in our hands, we need not surrender."

"He has signed!" cried Gorenflot, tearing the paper from Henri, who buried his face in his hands.

"Then you are king!" cried the cardinal to the duke; "take the precious paper."

The king overturned the little lamp which alone lighted the scene, but the duke already held the parchment.

"What shall we do?" said a monk. "Here is Crillon, with his guards, threatening to break in the doors!"

"In the king's name!" cried the powerful voice of Crillon.

"There is no king!" cried Gorenflot through the window.

"Who says that?" cried Crillon.

"I! I!"

"Break in the doors, Monsieur Crillon!" said, from outside, a voice which made the hair of all the monks, real and pretended, stand on end.

"Yes, sire," replied Crillon, giving a tremendous blow with a hatchet on the door.

"What do you want?" said the prior, going to the window.

"Ah! it is you, M. Foulon," replied the same voice, "I want my jester, who is in one of your cells. I want Chicot, I am ennuyé at the Louvre."

"And I have been much amused, my son," said Chicot, throwing off his hood, and pushing his way through the crowd of monks, who recoiled, with a cry of terror.

At this moment the Duc de Guise, advancing to a lamp, read the signature obtained with so much labor. It was "Chicot I."

"Chicot!" cried he; "thousand devils!"

"Let us fly!" said the cardinal, "we are lost."

"Ah!" cried Chicot, turning to Gorenflot, who was nearly fainting, and he began to strike him with the cord he had round his waist.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

INTEREST AND CAPITAL.

As the king spoke and the conspirators listened, they passed from astonishment to terror. Chicot I. relinquished his rôle of apparent terror, threw back his hood, crossed his arms, and, while Gorenflot fled at his utmost speed, sustained, firm and smiling, the first shock. It was a terrible moment, for the gentlemen, furious at the mystification of which they had been the dupes, advanced menacingly on the Gascon. But this unarmed man, his breast covered only by his arms—this laughing face, stopped them still more than the remonstrance of the cardinal, who said to them that Chicot's death could serve no end, but, on the contrary, would be terribly avenged by the king, who was the jester's accomplice in this scene of terrible buffoonery.

The result was, that daggers and rapiers were lowered before Chicot, who continued to laugh in their faces.

However, the king's menaces and Crillon's blows became more vehement, and it was evident that the door could not long resist such an attack. Thus, after a moment's deliberation, the Duc de Guise gave the order for retreat. This order made Chicot smile, for, during his nights

with Gorenflot he had examined the cave and found out the door, of which he had informed the king, who had placed there Torquenot, lieutenant of the Swiss guards. It was then evident that the leaguers, one after another, were about to throw themselves into the trap. The cardinal made off first, followed by about twenty gentlemen. Then Chicot saw the duke pass with about the same number, and afterward Mayenne. When Chicot saw him go he laughed outright. Ten minutes passed, during which he listened earnestly, thinking to hear the noise of the leaguers sent back into the cave, but to his astonishment the sound continued to go further and further off. His laugh began to change into oaths. Time passed, and the leaguers did not return; had they seen that the door was guarded and found another way out? Chicot was about to rush from the cell, when all at once the door was obstructed by a mass which fell at his feet, and began to tear its hair.

"Ah! wretch that I am!" cried the monk. "Oh! my good M. Chicot, pardon me, pardon me!"

How did Gorenflot, who went first, return now alone? was the question that presented itself to Chicot's mind.

"Oh! my good M. Chicot!" he continued to cry, "pardon your unworthy friend, who repents at your knees."

"But how is it you have not fled with the others?"

"Because the Lord in His anger has struck me with obesity, and I could not pass where the others did. Oh! unlucky stomach! Oh! miserable paunch!" cried the monk, striking with his two hands the part he apostrophized. "Ah! why am not I thin like you, M. Chicot?"

Chicot understood nothing of the lamentations of the monk.

"But the others are flying, then?" cried he, in a voice of thunder.

"Pardieu! what should they do? Wait to be hanged? Oh! unlucky paunch!"

"Silence, and answer me."

"Interrogate me, M. Chicot; you have the right."

"How are the others escaping?"

"As fast as they can."

"So I imagine; but where?"

"By the hole."

"Mordieu! what hole?"

"The hole in the cemetery cellar."

"Is that what you call the cave?"

"Oh! no; the door of that was guarded outside. The great cardinal, just as he was about to open it, heard a Swiss say, 'Mich dwistel,' which means, 'I am thirsty.'"

"Ventre de biche! so then they took another way?"

"Yes, dear M. Chicot, they are getting out through the cellar."

"How does that run?"

"From the crypt to the Porte St. Jacques."

"You lie; I should have seen them repass before this cell."

"No, dear M. Chicot; they thought they had not time for that, so they are creeping out through the air-hole."

"What hole?"

"One which looks into the garden, and serves to light the cellar.'

"So that you—"

"I was too big, and could not pass, and they drew me back by my legs, because I intercepted the way for the others."

"Then he who is bigger than you?"

"He! who?"

"Oh! Holy Virgin, I promise you a dozen wax candles if he also cannot pass."

"M. Chicot!"

"Get up."

The monk raised himself from the ground as quickly as he could.

"Now lead me to the hole."

"Where you wish."

"Go on, then, wretch."

Gorenflot went on as fast as he was able, while Chicot indulged himself by giving him a few blows with the cord. They traversed the corridor, and descended into the garden.

"Here! this way," said Gorenflot.

"Hold your tongue, and go on."

"There it is," and exhausted by his efforts, the monk sank on the grass, while Chicot, hearing groans, advanced, and saw something protruding through the hole. By the side of this something lay a frock and a sword. It was evident that

the individual in the hole had taken off successively all the loose clothing which increased his size; and yet, like Gorenflot, he was making useless efforts to get through.

"Mordieu! ventrebleu! sangdieu!" cried a stifled voice. "I would rather pass through the midst of the guards. Do not pull so hard, my friends; I shall come through gradually; I feel that I advance, not quickly, it is true, but I do advance."

"Ventre de biche!" murmured Chicot, "it is M. de Mayenne. Holy Virgin, you have gained your candles."

And he made a noise with his feet like some one running fast.

"They are coming," cried several voices from inside.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, as if out of breath, "it is you, miserable monk!"

"Say nothing, monseigneur!" murmured the voices, "he takes you for Gorenflot."

"Ah! it is you, heavy mass—pondus immobile; it is you, indigesta moles!"

And at each apostrophe, Chicot, arrived at last at his desired vengeance, let fall the cord with all the weight of his arm on the body before him.

"Silence!" whispered the voices again; "he takes you for Gorenflot."

Mayenne only uttered groans, and made immense efforts to get through.

"Ah! conspirator!" cried Chicot again; "ah! unworthy monk, this is for your drunkenness, this for idleness, this for anger, this for greediness, and this for all the vices you have."

"M. Chicot, have pity," whipered Gorenflot.

"And here, traitor, this is for your treason," continued Chicot.

"Ah! why did it not please God to substitute for your vulgar carcase the high and mighty shoulders of the Duc de Mayenne, to whom I owe a volley of blows, the interest of which has been accumulating for seven years!"

"Chicot!" cried the duke.

"Yes, Chicot, unworthy servant of the king, who wishes he had the hundred arms of Briareus for this occasion." And he redoubled his blows with such violence that the sufferer, making a tremendous effort, pushed himself through, and fell torn and bleeding into the arms of his friends. Chicot's last blow fell into empty space. He turned, and saw that the true Gorenflot had fainted with terror.

CHAPTER XC.

WHAT WAS PASSING NEAR THE BASTILLE WHILE CHICOT WAS PAYING HIS DEBT TO M. DE MAYENNE.

It was eleven at night, and the Duc d'Anjou was waiting impatiently at home for a messenger from the Duc de Guise. He walked restlessly up and down, looking every minute at the clock. All at once he heard a horse in the courtyard, and thinking it was the messenger, he ran to the window, but it was a groom leading up and down a horse which was waiting for its master, who almost immediately came out. It was Bussy, who, as captain of the duke's guards, came to give the password for the night. The duke, seeing this handsome and brave young man, of whom he had never had reason to complain, experienced an instant's remorse, but on his face he read so much joy, hope, and happiness, that all his jealousy returned. However, Bussy, ignorant that the duke was watching him, jumped into his saddle and rode off to his own hotel, where he gave his horse to the groom. There he saw Remy.

"Ah! you, Remy?"

"Myself, monsieur."

"Not yet in bed?"

"I have just come in. Indeed, since I have no longer a patient, it seems to me that the days have forty-eight hours."

"Are you ennuyé?"

"I fear so."

"Then Gertrude is abandoned?"

"Perfectly."

"You grew tired?"

"Of being beaten. That was how her love showed itself."

"And does your heart not speak for her to-night?"

"Why to-night?"

"Because I would have taken you with me."

"To the Bastille?"

"Yes."

"You are going there?"

"Yes."

"And Monsoreau?"

"Is at Compiègne, preparing a chase for the king."

"Are you sure, monsieur?"

"The order was given publicly this morning."

"Ah! well; Jourdain, my sword."

"You have changed your mind?"

"I will accompany you to the door, for two reasons."

"What are they?"

"Firstly, lest you should meet any enemies."

Bussy smiled.

"Oh! mon Dieu, I know you fear no one, and that Remy the doctor is but a poor companion; still, two men are not so likely to be attacked as one. Secondly, because I have a great deal of good advice to give you."

"Come, my dear Remy, come. We will speak of her; and next to the pleasure of seeing the woman you love, I know none greater than talking of her."

Bussy then took the arm of the young doctor, and they set off. Remy on the way tried hard to induce Bussy to return early, insisting that he would be more fit for his duel on the morrow.

Bussy smiled. "Fear nothing," said he.

"Ah! my dear master, to-morrow you ought to fight like Hercules against Antæus—like Theseus against the Minotaur—like Bayard—like something Homeric, gigantic impossible; I wish people to speak of it in future times as the combat, par excellence, and in which you had not even received a scratch."

"Be easy, my dear Remy, you shall see wonders. This morning I put swords in the hands of four fencers, who during eight minutes could not touch me once, while I tore their doublets to pieces."

So conversing, they arrived in the Rue St. Antoine.

"Adieu! here we are," said Bussy.

"Shall I wait for you?"

"Why?"

"To make sure that you will return before two o'clock, and have at least five or six hours' sleep before your duel."

"If I give you my word?"

"Oh! that will be enough; Bussy's word is never doubted."

"You have it then."

"Then, adieu, monsieur."

"Adieu, Remy."

Remy watched, and saw Bussy enter, not this time by the window, but boldly through the door, which Gertrude opened for him. Then Remy turned to go home; but he had only gone a few steps, when he saw coming toward him five armed men, wrapped in cloaks. When they arrived about ten yards from him, they said good-night to each other, and four went off in different directions, while the fifth remained stationary.

"M. de St. Luc!" said Remy.

"Remy!"

"Remy, in person. Is it an indiscretion to ask what your lordship does at this hour so far from the Louvre?"

"Ma foi! I am examining, by the king's order, the physiognomy of the city. He said to me, 'St. Luc, walk about the streets of Paris, and if you hear any one say I have abdicated, contradict him.'"

"And have you heard it?"

"Nowhere; and as it is just midnight, and I have met no one but M. de Monsoreau, I have dismissed my friends, and am about to return."

"M. de Monsoreau!"——"Yes."

"You met him?"

"With a troop of armed men; ten or twelve at least."

"Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"He ought to be at Compiègne."

"He ought to be, but he is not."

"But the king's order?"

"Bah! who obeys the king?"

"Did he know you?"

"I believe so."

"You were but five?"

"My four friends and I."

"And he did not attack you?"

"On the contrary, he avoided me, which astonished me, as on seeing him I expected a terrible battle."

"Where was he going?"

"To the Rue de la Tixanderie."

"Ah! mon Dieu!"

"What?"

"M. de St. Luc, a great misfortune is about to happen."

"To whom?"

"To M. de Bussy."

"Bussy! speak, Remy; I am his friend, you know."

"Oh! M. de Bussy thought him at Compiègne."

"Well?"

"And, profiting by his absence, is with Madame de Monsoreau."

"Ah!"

"Do you not see? he has had suspicions, and has feigned to depart, that he might appear unexpectedly."

"Ah! it is the Duc d'Anjou's doing, I believe. Have you good lungs, Remy?"

"Corbleu! like a blacksmith's bellows."

"Well! let us run. You know the house?"

"Yes."

"Go on then." And the young men set off like hunted deer.

"Is he much in advance of us?" said Remy.

"About a quarter of an hour."

"If we do but arrive in time!"

CHAPTER XCI.

THE ASSASSINATION.

BUSSY, himself without disquietude or hesitation, had been received by Diana without fear, for she believed herself sure of the absence of M. de Monsoreau. Never had this beautiful woman been more beautiful, nor Bussy more happy. She was moved, however, by fears for the morrow's combat, now so near, and she repeated to him, again and again, the anxiety she felt about it, and questioned him as to the arrangements he had made for flight. To conquer was not all; there was afterward the king's anger to avoid, for it was not probable that he would ever pardon the death or defeat of his favorites.

"And then," said she, "are you not acknowledged to be the bravest man in France? Why make it a point of honor to augment your glory? You are already superior to other men, and you do not wish to please any other woman but me, Louis. Therefore, guard your life, or rather—for I think there is not a man in France capable of killing you, Louis—I should say, take care of wounds, for you may be wounded. Indeed, it was through a wound received in fighting with these same men that I first made your acquaintance."

"Make yourself easy," said Bussy, smiling; "I will take care of my face—I shall not be disfigured."

"Oh, take care of yourself altogether. Think of the grief you would experience if you saw me brought home wounded and bleeding, and that I should feel the same grief on seeing your blood. Be prudent, my too courageous hero—that is all I ask. Act like the Roman of whom you read to me the other day: let your friends fight, aid the one who needs it most, but if three men—if two men attack you, fly; you can turn, like Horatius, and kill them one after another."

"Yes, my dear Diana."

"Oh, you reply without hearing me, Louis; you look at me, and do not listen."

"But I see you, and you are beautiful."

"Do not think of my beauty just now! Mon Dieu! it is your life I am speaking of. Stay, I will tell you something that will make you more prudent—I shall have the courage to witness this duel."

"You!"

"I shall be there."

"Impossible, Diana!"

"No; listen. There is, in the room next to this, a window looking into a little court, but with a side-view of the Tournelles."

"Yes, I remember—the window from which I threw crumbs to the birds the other day."

"From there I can have a view of the ground; therefore, above all things, take care to stand so that I can see you: you will know that I am there, but do not look at me, lest your enemy should profit by it."

"And kill me, while I had my eyes fixed upon you. If I had to choose my

death, Diana, that is the one I should prefer."

"Yes; but now you are not to die, but live."

"And I will live; therefore tranquilize yourself, Diana. Besides, I am well seconded—you do not know my friends; Antragues uses his sword as well as I do, Ribeirac is so steady on the ground that his eyes and his arms alone seem to be alive, and Livarot is as active as a tiger. Believe me, Diana, I wish there were more danger, for there would be more honor."

"Well, I believe you, and I smile and hope; but listen, and promise to obey me."

"Yes, if you do not tell me to leave."

"It is just what I am about to do. I appeal to your reason."

"Then you should not have made me mad."

"No nonsense, but obedience—that is the way to prove your love."

"Order, then."

"Dear friend, you want a long sleep; go home."

"Not already."

"Yes, I am going to pray for you."

"Pray now, then."

As he spoke, a pane of the window flew into pieces, then the window itself, and three armed men appeared on the balcony, while a fourth was climbing over. This one had his face covered with a mask, and held in his right hand a sword, and in his left a pistol.

Bussy remained paralyzed for a moment by the dreadful cry uttered by Diana at this sight. The masked man made a sign, and the three others advanced. Bussy put Diana back, and drew his sword.

"Come, my brave fellows!" said a sepulchral voice from under the mask; "he is already half-dead with fear."

"You are wrong," said Bussy; "I never feel fear."

Diana drew near him.

"Go back, Diana," said he. But she threw herself on his neck. "You will get me killed," said he; and she drew back.

"Ah!" said the masked man, "it is M. de Bussy, and I would not believe it, fool that I was! Really, what a good and excellent friend! He learns that the husband is absent, and has left his wife alone, and fears she may be afraid, so he comes to keep her company, although on the eve of a duel. I repeat, he is a good and excellent friend!"

"Ah! it is you, M. de Monsoreau!" said Bussy; "throw off your mask."

"I will," said he, doing so.

Diana uttered another cry; the comte was as pale as a corpse, but he smiled like a demon.

"Let us finish, monsieur," said Bussy; "it was very well for Homer's heroes, who were demigods, to talk before they fought; but I am a man—attack me, or let me pass."

Monsoreau replied by a laugh which made Diana shudder, but raised Bussy's anger.

"Let me pass!" cried he.

"Oh, oh!"

"Then, draw and have done; I wish to go home and I live far off."

During this time two other men mounted into the balcony.

"Two and four make six," said Bussy, "where are the others?"

"Waiting at the door."

Diana fell on her knees, and in spite of her efforts Bussy heard her sobs.

"My dear comte," said he, "you know I am a man of honor."

"Yes, you are, and madame is a faithful wife."

"Good, monsieur; you are severe, but, perhaps, it is deserved; only as I have a prior engagement with four gentlemen, I beg to be allowed to retire to-night, and I pledge my word you shall find me again, when and where you will."

Monsoreau shrugged his shoulders.

"I swear to you, monsieur," said Bussy, "that when I have satisfied MM. Quelus, Schomberg, D'Epernon, and Maugiron, I shall be at your service If they kill me, your vengeance will be satisfied, and if not—"

Monsoreau turned to his men. "On, my brave fellows," said he.

"Oh!" said Bussy, "I was wrong; it is not a duel, but an assassination."

"Yes."

"We were each deceived with regard to the other; but remember, monsieur, that the Duc d'Anjou will avenge me."

"It was he who sent me."

Diana groaned.

Instantaneously Bussy overturned the prie-Dieu, drew a table toward him, and threw a chair over all, so that in a second he had formed a kind of rampart between himself and his enemies. This movement had been so rapid that the ball fired at him from the arquebuse only struck the prie-Dieu. Diana sobbed aloud. Bussy glanced at her, and then at his assailants, crying, "Come on, but take care, for my sword is sharp."

The men advanced, and one tried to seize the prie-Dieu, but before he reached it, Bussy's sword pierced his arm. The man uttered a cry, and fell back.

Bussy then heard rapid steps in the corridor, and thought he was surrounded. He flew to the door to lock it, but before he could reach it, it was opened, and two men rushed in.

"Ah! dear master!" cried a well-known voice, "are we in time?"

"Remy!"

"And I?" cried a second voice, "it seems they are attempting assassination here."

"St. Luc!" cried Bussy, joyfully. "Ah! M. de Monsoreau, I think now you will do well to let us pass, for if you do not, we will pass over you."

"Three more men," cried Monsoreau. And they saw three new assailants appear on the balcony.

"They are an army," cried St. Luc.

"Oh! God protect him!" cried Diana.

"Wretch!" cried Monsoreau, and he advanced to strike her. Bussy saw the movement. Agile as a tiger, he bounded on him, and touched him in the throat; but the distance was too great, it was only a scratch. Five or six men rushed on Bussy, but one fell beneath the sword of St. Luc.

"Remy!" cried Bussy, "carry away Diana."

Monsoreau uttered a yell and snatched a pistol from one of the men.

Remy hesitated. "But you?" said he.

"Away! away! I confide her to you."

"Come, madame," said Remy.

"Never! I will never leave him."

Remy seized her in his arms.

"Bussy, help me! Bussy!" cried Diana. For any one who separated her from Bussy seemed an enemy to her.

"Go," cried Bussy, "I will rejoin you."

At this moment Monsoreau fired, and Bussy saw Remy totter, and then fall, dragging Diana with him. Bussy uttered a cry, and turned.

"It is nothing, master," said Remy. "It was I who received the ball. She is safe."

As Bussy turned, three men threw themselves on him; St. Luc rushed forward, and one of them fell. The two others drew back.

"St. Luc," cried Bussy, "by her you love, save Diana."

"But you?"

"I am a man."

St. Luc rushed to Diana, seized her in his arms, and disappeared through the door.

"Here, my men, from the staircase," shouted Monsoreau.

"Ah! coward!" cried Bussy.

Monsoreau retreated behind his men. Bussy gave a back stroke and a thrust; with the first he cleft open a head, and with the second pierced a breast.

"That clears!" cried he.

"Fly, master!" cried Remy.

"Diana must save herself first," murmured he.

"Take care," cried Remy again, as four men rushed in through the door from the staircase. Bussy saw himself between two troops, but his only cry was, "Ah! Diana!"

Then, without losing a second, he rushed on the four men; and taken by surprise, two fell, one dead, one wounded.

Then, as Monsoreau advanced, he retreated again behind his rampart.

"Push the bolts, and turn the key," cried Monsoreau, "we have him now." During this time, by a great effort, Remy

had dragged himself before Bussy, and added his body to the rampart.

There was an instant's pause. Bussy looked around him. Seven men lay stretched on the ground, but nine remained. And seeing these nine swords, and hearing Monsoreau encouraging them, this brave man, who had never known fear, saw plainly before him the image of death, beckoning him with its gloomy smile.

"I may kill five more," thought he, "but the other four will kill me. I have strength for ten minutes' more combat; in that ten minntes let me do what man never did before."

And rushing forward, he gave three thrusts, and three times he pierced the leather of a shoulder-belt, or the buff of a jacket, and three times a stream of blood followed.

During this time he had parried twenty blows with his left arm, and his cloak, which he had wrapped round it, was hacked to pieces.

The men changed their tactics; seeing two of their number fall and one retire, they renounced the sword, and some tried to strike with the butt ends of their muskets, while others fired at him with pistols. He avoided the balls by jumping from side to side, or by stooping; for he seemed not only to see, hear and act, but to divine every movement of his enemies, and appeared more than a man, or only man because he was mortal. Then he thought that to kill Monsoreau would be the best way to end the combat, and sought him with his eyes among his assailants, but he stood in the background, loading the pistols for his men. However, Bussy rushed forward, and found himself face to face with him. He, who held a loaded pistol, fired, and the ball, striking Bussy's sword, broke it off six inches from the handle.

"Disarmed!" cried Monsoreau.

Bussy drew back, picking up his broken blade, and in an instant it was fastened to the handle with a handkerchief; and the battle recommenced, presenting the extraordinary spectacle of a man almost without arms, but also almost without wounds, keeping six enemies at bay, and with ten corpses at his feet for a rampart. When the fight began again, Monsoreau commenced to draw away the bodies, lest Bussy should snatch a sword from one of them. Bussy was surrounded; the blade of his sword bent and shook in his hand, and fatigue began to render his arm heavy, when suddenly, one of the bodies raising itself, pushed a rapier into his hand. It was Remy's last act of devotion. Bussy uttered a cry of joy, and threw away his broken sword: at the same moment Monsoreau fired at Remy, and the ball entered his brain. This time he fell to rise no more.

Bussy uttered a cry. His strength seemed to return to him, and he whirled round his sword in a circle, cutting through a wrist at his right-hand, and laying open a cheek at his left. Exhausted by the effort, he let his right arm fall for a moment, while with his left he tried to undraw the bolts behind him. During this second, he received a ball in his thigh, and two swords touched his side. But he had unfastened the bolt and turned the key. Sublime with rage, he rushed on Monsoreau and wounded him in the breast.

"Ah!" cried Bussy, "I begin to think I shall escape."

The four men rushed on him, but they could not touch him, and were repulsed with blows. Monsoreau approached him twice more, and twice more was wounded. But three men seized hold of the handle of his sword, and tore it from him. He seized a stool of carved wood, and struck three blows with it, and knocked down two men; but it broke on the shoulder of the third, who sent his dagger into Bussy's breast.

Bussy seized him by the wrist, forced the dagger from him, and stabbed him to the heart. The last man jumped out of the window. Bussy made two steps to follow him, but Monsoreau, raising himself from the floor, where he was lying, wounded him in the leg with his dagger. The young man seized a sword which lay near, and plunged it so vigorously into his breast, that he pinned him to the floor.

"Ah!" cried Bussy, "I do not know if I shall live, but at least I shall have seen you die!"

Bussy dragged himself to the corridor, his wounds bleeding fearfully. He threw a last glance behind him. The moon was shining brilliantly, and its light penetrated this room inundated with blood, and illuminated the walls pierced by balls, and hacked by blows, and lighted up the pale faces of the dead, which even then seemed to preserve the fierce look of assassins. Bussy, at the sight of this field of battle, peopled by him with slain, nearly dying as he was, experienced a feeling of pride. As he had intended, he had done what no man had done before him. There now remained to him only to fly.

But all was not over for the unfortunate young man. On arriving on the staircase, he saw arms shine in the courtyard; some one fired, and the ball pierced his shoulder. The court being guarded, he thought of the little window, where Diana had said she would sit to see the combat, and as quickly as he could he dragged himself there and locked the door behind him; then he mounted the window with great difficulty, and measured the distance with his eyes, wondering if he could jump to the other side.

"Oh, I shall never have the strength!" cried he.

But at that moment he heard steps coming up the staircase; it was the second troop mounting. He collected all his strength and made a spring; but his foot slipped, and he fell on the iron spikes, which caught his clothes, and he hung suspended.

He thought of his only friend.

"St. Luc!" cried he, "help! St. Luc!"

"Ah, it is you, M. de Bussy," answered a voice from behind some trees.

Bussy shuddered, for it was not the voice of St. Luc.

"St. Luc!" cried he again, "come to me! Diana is safe! I have killed Monsoreau!"

"Ah! Monsoreau is killed?" said the same voice.

"Yes." Then Bussy saw two men come out from behind the trees.

"Gentlemen!" cried he, "in Heaven's name, help an unfortunate nobleman, who may still escape if you aid him."

"What do you say, monseigneur?" said one.

"Imprudent!" said the other.

"Monseigneur," cried Bussy, who heard the conversation, "deliver me, and I will pardon you for betraying me."

"Do you hear?" said the duke.

"What do you order?"

"That you deliver him from his sufferings," answered he, with a kind of laugh.

Bussy turned his head to look at the man who laughed at such a time, and at the same instant an arquebuse was discharged into his breast.

"Cursed assassin! oh, Diana!" murmured he, and fell back dead.

"Is he dead?" cried several men who, after forcing the door, appeared at the windows.

"Yes," said Aurilly. "But fly; remember that his highness the Duc d'Anjou was the friend and protector of M. de Bussy."

The men instantly made off, and when the sound of their steps was lost, the duke said, "Now, Aurilly, go up into the room and throw out of the window the body of Monsoreau."

Aurilly obeyed, and the blood fell over the clothes of the duke, who, however, raised the coat of the dead man, and drew out the paper which he had signed.

"This is all I wanted," said he; "so now let us go."

"And Diana?"

"Ma foi!" he replied, "I care no more for her. Untie her and St. Luc, and let them go."

Aurilly disappeared.

"I shall not be king of France," murmured the duke, "but, at all events, I shall not be beheaded for high treason."

CHAPTER XCII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT FOUND HIMSELF MORE THAN EVER BETWEEN A GALLOWS AND AN ABBEY.

THE guard placed to catch the conspirators got none of them; they all escaped, as we have seen; therefore, when Crillon at last broke open the door, he found the place deserted and empty. In vain they opened doors and windows; in vain the king cried, "Chicot!" No one answered.

"Can they have killed him?" said he. "Mordieu! if they have they shall pay for it!"

Chicot did not reply, because he was occupied in beating M. de Mayenne, which gave him so much pleasure that he neither heard nor saw what was passing. However, when the duke had disappeared, he heard and recognized the royal voice.

"Here, my son, here!" he cried, trying at the same time to raise Gorenflot, who, beginning to recover himself, cried, "Monsieur Chicot!"

"You are not dead, then?"

"My good M. Chicot, you will not give me up to my enemies?"

"Wretch!"

Gorenflot began to howl and wring his hands.

"I, who have had so many good dinners with you," continued Gorenflot; "I, who drank so well, that you always called me the king of the sponges; I, who loved so much the capons you used to order at the Corne d'Abondance, that I never left anything but the bones."

This climax appeared sublime to Chicot, and determined him to clemency.

"Here they are! Mon Dieu," cried Gorenflot, vainly trying to rise, "here they come, I am lost! Oh! good M. Chicot, help me!" and finding he could not rise, he threw himself with his face to the ground.

"Get up," said Chicot.

"Do you pardon me?"

"We shall see."

"You have beaten me so much."

Chicot laughed; the poor monk fancied he had received the blows given to Mayenne.

"You laugh, M. Chicot."

"I do, animal."

"Then I shall live?"

"Perhaps."

"You would not laugh if your Gorenflot was about to die."

"It does not depend upon me, but on the king; he alone has the power of life and death."

At this moment lights appeared, and a crowd of embroidered dresses and swords shining in the light of the torches.

"Ah! Chicot! my dear Chicot, how glad I am to see you," cried the king.

"You hear, good M. Chicot," whispered Gorenflot, "this great prince is glad to see you."

"Well?"

"Well! in his happiness he would not refuse you a favor; ask for my pardon."

"What! from Herod?"

"Oh! silence, dear M. Chicot."

"Well! sire, how many have you caught?" said Chicot, advancing.

"Confiteor," said Gorenflot.

"Not one," said Crillon, "the traitors must have found some opening unknown to us."

"It is probable."

"But you saw them?" said the king.

"All."

"You recognized them, no doubt?"

"No, sire."

"Not recognized them?"

"That is to say, I recognized only one."

"Who was that?"

"M. de Mayenne."

"M. de Mayenne, to whom you owed—"

"Yes, sire; we are quits."

"Ah! tell me about that, Chicot."

"Afterward, my son; now let us think of the present."

"Confiteor," repeated Gorenflot.

"Ah! you have made a prisoner," said Crillon, laying his large hand on the monk's shoulder.

Chicot was silent for a minute, leaving Gorenflot a prey to all the anguish of such profound terror that he nearly fainted again.

At last Chicot said, "Sire, look well at this monk."

"The preacher Gorenflot," cried Henri.

"Confiteor, confiteor," repeated he.

"Himself," said Chicot.

"He who—"

"Just so," interrupted Chicot.

"Ah, ah!"

Gorenflot shook with terror, for he heard the sounds of swords clashing.

"Wait," said Chicot, "the king must know all." And, taking him aside, "My son," said he, "thank God for having permitted this holy man to be born thirty-five years ago, for it is he who has saved us all."

"How so?"

"It was he who recounted to me the whole plot, from the alpha to the omega."

"When?"

"About a week ago; so that if ever your majesty's enemies catch him he will be a dead man."

Gorenflot heard only the last words, "a dead man;" and he covered his face with his hands.

"Worthy man," said the king, casting a benevolent look on the mass of flesh before him, "we will cover him with our protection."

Gorenflot perceived the nature of the look, and began to feel relieved.

"You will do well, my king," said Chicot.

"What must we do with him?"

"I think that as long as he remains in Paris he will be in danger."

"If I gave him guards."

Gorenflot heard this proposition of Henri's. "Well!" thought he, "I shall get off with imprisonment; I prefer that to beating, if they only feed me well."

"Oh! no, that is needless," said Chicot, "if you will allow me to take him with me."

"Where?"

"Home."

"Well! take him, and then return to the Louvre."

"Get up, reverend father," said Chicot.

"He mocks me," murmured Gorenflot.

"Get up, brute," whispered Chicot, giving him a sly kick.

"Ah! I have deserved it," cried Gorenflot.

"What does he say?" asked the king.

"Sire, he is thinking over all his fatigues and his tortures, and when I promised him your protection, he said, 'Oh! I have well merited that.'"

"Poor devil!" said the king, "take good care of him."

"Oh! be easy, sire, he will want for nothing with me."

"Oh! M. Chicot, dear M. Chicot," cried Gorenflot, "where am I to be taken to?"

"You will know soon. Meanwhile, monster of iniquity, thank his majesty."

"What for?"

"Thank him, I tell you."

"Sire," stammered Gorenflot, "since your gracious majesty—"

"Yes," interrupted Henri, "I know all you did for me, in your journey from Lyons, on the evening of the League, and again to-day. Be easy, you shall be recompensed according to your merits."

Gorenflot sighed.

"Where is Panurge?" said Chicot.

"In the stable, poor beast."

"Well! go and fetch him, and return to me."

"Yes, M. Chicot."

And the monk went away as fast as he could, much astonished not to be followed by guards.

"Now, my son," said Chicot, "keep twenty men for your own escort, and send ten with M. Crillon to the Hotel d'Anjou and let them bring your brother here."

"Why?"

"That he may not escape a second time."

"Did my brother—"

"Have you repented following my advice to-day?"

"No, par la mordieu."

"Then do what I tell you."

Henri gave the order to Crillon, who set off at once.

"And you?" said Henri.

"Oh! I am waiting for my saint."

"And you will rejoin me at the Louvre?"

"In an hour; go, my son."

Henri went; and Chicot, proceeding to the stables, met Gorenflot coming out on

his ass. The poor devil had not an idea of endeavoring to escape from the fate that he thought awaited him.

"Come, come," said Chicot, "we are waited for."

Gorenflot made no resistance, but he shed many tears.

CHAPTER XCIII.

WHERE CHICOT GUESSES WHY D'EPERNON HAD BLOOD ON HIS FEET AND NONE IN HIS CHEEKS.

THE king, returning to the Louvre, found his friends peacefully asleep, except D'Epernon, whose bed was empty.

"Not come in yet; how imprudent," murmured the king to Chicot, who had also returned, and was standing with him by their beds. "The fool; having to fight to-morrow with a man like Bussy, and to take no more care than this. Let them seek M. d'Epernon," said he, going out of the room, and speaking to an usher.

"M. d'Epernon is just coming in, sire," replied the man.

Indeed, D'Epernon came softly along, thinking to glide unperceived to his room.

On seeing the king he looked confused.

"Ah! here you are at last," said Henri; "come here and look at your friends. They are wise! they understand the importance of the duel to-morrow; but you, instead of praying and sleeping like them, have been running about the streets. Corbleu; how pale you are! What will you look like to-morrow?"

D'Epernon was indeed pale, but at the king's remark he colored.

"Now go to bed," continued Henri, "and sleep if you can."

"Why not?"

"Much time you will have. You are to fight at daybreak; and at this time of year the sun rises at four. It is now two; you have but two hours to sleep."

"Two hours well employed go a long way."

"You will sleep, then?"

"Well, sire!"

"I do not believe it."

"Why not?"

"Because you are agitated; you think of to-morrow."

"I will sleep, sire, if your majesty will only let me."

"That is just," said Chicot.

Indeed D'Epernon undressed and got into bed, with a calm and satisfied look, that seemed, both to the king and Chicot, to augur well.

"He is as brave as a Cæsar," said the king.

"So brave that I do not understand it," said Chicot.

"See, he sleeps already."

Chicot approached the bed to look.

"Oh!" said he.

"What is it?"

"Look," and he pointed to D'Epernon's boots.

"Blood!"

"He has been walking in blood."

"Can he be wounded?" said th king, anxiously.

"Bah! he would have told us; and, besides, unless he had been wounded like Achilles in the heel—"

"See, the sleeve of his doublet is also spotted. What can have happened to him?"

"Perhaps he has killed some one to keep his hand in."

"It is singular. Well, to-morrow, at least—"

"To-day, you mean."

"Well! to-day I shall be tranquil."

"Why so?"

"Because those cursed Angevins will be killed."

"You think so, Henri?"

"I am sure of it; my friends are brave."

"I never heard that the Angevins were cowards."

"No, doubtless; but my friends are so strong; look at Schomberg's arm; what muscle!"

"Ah! if you saw Antragues's! Is that all that reassures you?"

"No; come and I will show you something."

"Where?"

"In my room."

"And this something makes you confident of victory?"

"Yes."

"Come, then."

"Wait, and let me take leave of them. Adieu, my good friends," murmured the king, as he stooped and imprinted a light kiss on each of their foreheads.

Chicot was not superstitious, but as he looked on, his imagination pictured a living man making his adieux to the dead.

"It is singular," thought he. "I never felt so before—poor fellows."

As soon as the king quitted the room, D'Epernon opened his eyes; and, jumping out of bed, began to efface, as well as he could, the spots of blood on his clothes. Then he went to bed again.

As for Henri, he conducted Chicot to his room, and opened a long ebony coffer lined with white satin.

"Look!" said he.

"Swords!"

"Yes! but blessed swords, my dear friend."

"Blessed! by whom?"

"By our holy father the pope, who granted me this favor. To send this box to Rome and back cost me twenty horses and four men."

"Are they sharp?"

"Doubtless; but their great merit is that they are blessed."

"Yes, I know that; but still I should like to be sure they are sharp."

"Pagan!"

"Let us talk of something else."

"Well, be quick."

"You want to sleep?"

"No, to pray."

"In that case we will talk. Have you sent for M. d'Anjou?"

"Yes, he is waiting below."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Throw him into the Bastille."

"That is very wise: only choose a dungeon that is deep and safe—such, for example, as those which were occupied by the Constable de St. Paul, or Armagnac."

"Oh! be easy."

"I know where they sell good black velvet, my son."

"Chicot! he is my brother."

"Ah! true; the family mourning is violet. Shall you speak to him?"

"Yes, certainly; if only to show him that his plots are discovered."

"Hum!"

"Do you disapprove?"

"In your place I should cut short the conversation, and double the imprisonment."

"Let them bring here the Duc d'Anjou," said the king.

A minute after the duke entered, very pale and disarmed. Crillon followed him.

"Where did you find him?" asked the king.

"Sire, his highness was not at home, but I took possession of his hotel in the king's name, and soon after he returned, and we arrested him without resistance."

"That is fortunate." Then, turning to the prince, he said, "Where were you, monsieur?"

"Wherever I was, sire, be sure it was on your business."

"I doubt it."

Francois bowed.

"Come, tell me where you were while your accomplices were being arrested."

"My accomplices!"

"Yes; your accomplices."

"Sire, your majesty is making some mistake."

"Oh! this time you shall not escape me; your measure of crime is full."

"Sire, be moderate; there is certainly some one who slanders me to you."

"Wretch! you shall die of hunger in a cell of the Bastille!"

"I bow to your orders, whatever they may be."

"Hypocrite! But where were you?"

"Sire, I was serving your majesty, and working for the glory and tranquillity of your reign."

"Really! your audacity is great."

"Bah!" said Chicot, "tell us about it, my prince; it must be curious."

"Sire, I would tell your majesty, had you treated me as a brother, but as you have treated me as a criminal, I will let the event speak for itself."

Then, bowing profoundly to the king,

he turned to Crillon and the other officers, and said, "Now, which of you gentlemen will conduct the first prince of the blood to the Bastille?"

Chicot had been reflecting, and a thought struck him.

"Ah!" murmured he, "I believe I guess now why M. d'Epernon had so much blood on his feet and so little in his cheeks."

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE MORNING OF THE COMBAT.

THE king did not sleep all night, and very early in the morning he set off, accompanied by Chicot, to examine the ground where the combat was to take place.

"Quelus will be exposed to the sun," said he; "he will have it at his right, just in his only eye; whereas Maugiron, who has good eyes, will be in the shade. That is badly managed. As for Schomberg, his place is good; but Quelus, my poor Quelus!"

"Do not torment yourself so, my king, it is useless."

"And D'Epernon; I am really unjust not to think of him; he, who is to fight Bussy. Look at his place, Chicot, he who will have to give way constantly, for Bussy is like a tiger, he has a tree on his right and a ditch on his left."

"Bah!" said Chicot, "I am not concerned about D'Epernon."

"You are wrong; he will be killed."

"Not he; be sure he has taken precautions."

"How so?"

"He will not fight."

"Did you not hear what he said before going to bed?"

"That is just why I think he will not fight."

"Incredulous and distrustful!"

"I know my Gascon, Henri; but if you will take my advice, you will return to the Louvre."

"Do you think I can stay there during the combat?"

"I do not wish you not to love your friends, but I do wish you not to leave M. d'Anjou alone at the Louvre."

"Is not Crillon there?"

"Crillon is only a buffalo—a rhinoceros—a wild boar; while your brother is the serpent, whose strength lies in his cunning."

"You are right; I should have sent him to the Bastille."

When Chicot and the king entered, the young men were being dressed by their valets.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said he; "I find you all in good spirits, I hope?"

"Yes, sire," said Quelus.

"You look gloomy, Maugiron."

"Sire, I am superstitious, and I had bad dreams last night, so I am drinking a little wine to keep up my spirits."

"My friend, remember that dreams are the impressions of the previous day, and have no influence on the morrow."

"Yes, sire," said D'Epernon, "I also had bad dreams last night; but in spite of that, my hand is steady and fit for action."

"Yes," said Chicot, "you dreamed you had blood on your boots; that is not a bad dream, for it signifies that you will be a conqueror, like Alexander or Cæsar."

"My friends," said Henri, "remember you fight only for honor; the past night has seated me firmly on my throne, therefore do not think of me; and, above all things, no false bravery; you wish to kill your enemies, not to die yourselves."

The gentlemen were now ready, and it only remained to take leave of their master.

"Do you go on horseback?" asked he.

"No, sire, on foot."

They each kissed his hand, and D'Epernon said, "Sire, bless my sword."

"Not so, D'Epernon; give up your sword—I have a better one for each of you. Chicot, bring them here."

"No, sire, send your captain of the guards; I am but a pagan, and they might lose their virtue by coming through my hands."

"What are these swords, sire?" said Schomberg.

"Italian swords, my son, forged at Milan."

"Thanks, sire."

"Now go, it is time," said the king, who could hardly control his emotion.

"Sire," said Quelus, "shall we not have your majesty's presence to encourage us?"

"No, that would not be right; you will be supposed to fight without any one being cognizant of it, and without my sanction. Let it appear to be the result of a private quarrel."

When they were gone the king threw himself down in tears.

"Now," said Chicot, "I will go to see this duel, for I have an idea that something curious will happen with regard to D'Epernon." And he went off.

Henri shut himself up in his own room, first saying to Crillon, who knew what was to take place, "If we are conquerors, Crillon, come and tell me; if not, strike three blows on the door."

CHAPTER XCV.

THE FRIENDS OF BUSSY.

THE friends of the Duc d'Anjou had passed as good and tranquil a night as those of the king, although their master had not taken the same care of them. After a good supper, they had all retired to sleep at Antragues's house, which was nearest to the field of battle. Antragues, before supper, had gone to take leave of a little milliner whom he adored, Ribeirac had written to his mother, and Livarot had made his will. They were up early in the morning, and dressed themselves in red breeches and socks, that their enemies might not see their blood, and they had doublets of gray silk. They wore shoes without heels, and their pages carried their swords, that their arms might not be fatigued.

The weather was splendid, for love, war, or walking; and the sun gilded the roofs, on which the night dew was sparkling. The streets were dry, and the air delightful.

Before leaving the house, the young men had sent to the Hotel d'Anjou to inquire for Bussy, and had received a reply that he had gone out the evening before and had not yet returned.

"Oh!" said Antragues, "I know where he is; the king ordered a grand chase at Compiègne, and M. de Monsoreau was to set off yesterday. It is all right, gentlemen; he is nearer the ground than we are, and may be there before us. We will call for him in passing."

The streets were empty as they went along; no one was to be seen except peasants coming from Montreuil or Vincennes, with milk or vegetables.

The young men went on in silence until they reached the Rue St. Antoine.

Then, with a smile, they glanced at Monsoreau's house.

"One could see well from there, and I am sure poor Diana will be more than once at the window," said Antragues.

"I think she must be there already," said Ribeirac, "for the window is open."

"True, but what can be the meaning of that ladder before it?"

"It is odd."

"We are not the only ones to wonder," said Livarot, "see those peasants, who are stopping their carts to look."

The young men arrived under the balcony. "M. de Monsoreau," they cried, "do you intend to be present at our combat? if so, be quick, for we wish to arrive first."

They waited, but no one answered.

"Did you put up that ladder?" asked Antragues of a man who was examining the ground.

"God forbid!" replied he.

"Why so?"

"Look up."

"Blood!" cried Ribeirac.

"The door has been forced," said Antragues; and seizing the ladder, he was on the balcony in a moment.

"What is it?" cried the others, seeing him turn pale.

A terrible cry was his only answer. Livarot mounted behind him. "Corpses! death everywhere!" cried he. And they both entered the room. It bore horrible

traces of the terrible combat of the previous night. A river of blood flowed over the room; and the curtains were hanging in strips from sword cuts.

"Oh! poor Remy!" cried Antragues, suddenly.

"Dead!"

"Yes."

"But a regiment of troopers must have passed through the room," cried Livarot. Then, seeing the door of the corridor open, and traces of blood indicating that one or more of the combatants had also passed through there, he followed it. Meanwhile, Antragues went into the adjoining room; there also blood was everywhere, and this blood led to the window. He leaned out and looked into the little garden. The iron spikes still held the livid corpse of the unhappy Bussy. At this sight, it was not a cry, but a yell, that Antragues uttered. Livarot ran to see what it was, and Ribeirac followed.

"Look!" said Antragues, "Bussy dead! Bussy assassinated and thrown out of the window."

They ran down.

"It is he," cried Livarot.

"His wrist is cut."

"He has two balls in his breast."

"He is full of wounds."

"Ah! poor Bussy! we will have vengeance!"

Turning round they came against a second corpse. "Monsoreau!" cried Livarot.

"What! Monsoreau also."

"Yes, pierced through and through."

"Ah! they have assassinated all our friends."

"And his wife? Madame de Monsoreau!" cried Antragues; but no one answered.

"Bussy, poor Bussy."

"Yes, they wished to get rid of the most formidable of us all."

"It is cowardly! it is infamous!"

"We will tell the duke."

"No," said Antragues, "let us not charge any one with the care of our vengeance. Look, my friends, at the noble face of the bravest of men; see his blood, that teaches that he never left his vengeance to any other person. Bussy! we will act like you, and we will avenge you."

Then, drawing his sword, he dipped it in Bussy's blood.

"Bussy," said he, "I swear on your corpse, that this blood shall be washed off by the blood of your enemies."

"Bussy," cried the others, "we swear to kill them or die."

"No mercy," said Antragues.

"But we shall be but three."

"True, but we have assassinated no one, and God will strengthen the innocent. Adieu, Bussy!"

"Adieu, Bussy!" repeated the others; and they went out, pale but resolute, from that cursed house, around which a crowd had begun to collect.

Arriving on the ground, they found their opponents waiting for them.

"Gentlemen," said Quelus, rising and bowing, "we have had the honor of waiting for you."

"Excuse us," said Antragues, "but we should have been here before you, but for one of our companions."

"M. de Bussy," said D'Epernon, "I do not see him. Where is he?"

"We can wait for him," said Schomberg.

"He will not come."

All looked thunderstruck; but D'Epernon exclaimed:

"Ah! the brave man par excellence—is he, then, afraid?"

"That cannot be," said Quelus.

"You are right, monsieur," said Livarot.

"And why will he not come?"

"Because he is dead."

"Dead!" cried they all, but D'Epernon turned rather pale.

"And dead because he has been assassinated," said Antragues. "Did you not know it, gentlemen?"

"No; how should we?"

"Besides, is it certain?"

Antragues drew his sword. "So certain that here is his blood," said he.

"M. de Bussy assassinated!"

"His blood cries for vengeance! do you not hear it, gentlemen?" said Ribeirac.

"What do you mean?"

"'Seek whom the crime profits,' the law says," replied Ribeirac.

"Ah! gentlemen, will you explain yourselves?" cried Maugiron.

"That is just what we have come for."

"Quick! our swords are in our hands!" said D'Epernon.

"Oh! you are in a great hurry, M. de Gascon; you did not crow so loud when we were four against four!"

"Is it our fault, if you are only three?"

"Yes, it is your fault; he is dead because you preferred him lying in his blood to standing here; he is dead, with his wrist cut, that that wrist might no longer hold a sword; he is dead, that you might not see the lightning of those eyes, which dazzled you all. Do you understand me? am I clear?"

"Enough, gentlemen!" said Quelus. "Retire, M. d'Epernon; we will fight three against three. These gentlemen shall see if we are men to profit by a misfortune which we deplore as much as themselves. Come, gentlemen," added the young man, throwing his hat behind him, and raising his left hand, while he whirled his sword with the right, "God is our judge if we are assassins!"

"Ah! I hated you before," cried Schomberg, "and now I execrate you!"

"On your guard, gentlemen!" cried Antragues.

"With doublets or without?" said Schomberg.

"Without doublets, without shirts; our breasts bare, our hearts uncovered!"

The young men threw off their doublets and shirts.

"I have lost my dagger," said Quelus; "it must have fallen on the road."

"Or else you left it at M. de Monsoreau's, in the Place de la Bastille," said Antragues.

Quelus gave a cry of rage, and drew his sword.

"But he has no dagger, M. Antragues," cried Chicot, who had just arrived.

"So much the worse for him; it is not my fault," said Antragues.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE COMBAT.

THE place where this terrible combat was to take place was sequestered and shaded by trees. It was generally frequented only by children, who came to play there during the day, or by drunkards or robbers, who made a sleeping-place of it by night.

Chicot, his heart palpitating, although he was not of a very tender nature, seated himself before the lackeys and pages, on a wooden balustrade.

He did not love the Angevins, and detested the minions, but they were all brave young men, and in their veins flowed a generous blood, which he was probably destined to see flow before long.

D'Epernon made a last bravado, "What! you are all afraid of me?" he cried.

"Hold your tongue," said Antragues.

"Come away, bravest of the brave," said Chicot, "or else you will lose another pair of shoes."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there will soon be blood on the ground, and that you will walk in it, as you did last night."

D'Epernon became deadly pale, and, moving away, he seated himself at some distance from Chicot.

The combat began as five o'clock struck, and for a few minutes nothing was heard but the clashing of swords; not a blow was struck. At last Schomberg touched Ribeirac in the shoulder, and the blood gushed out; Schomberg tried to repeat the blow, but Ribeirac struck up his sword, and wounded him in the side.

"Now let us rest a few seconds, if you like," said Ribeirac.

Quelus, having no dagger, was at a great disadvantage; for he was obliged to parry with his left arm, and, as it was bare, on each occasion it cost him a wound. His hand was soon bleeding in several places, and Antragues had also wounded him in the breast; but at each wound he repeated, "It is nothing."

Livarot and Maugiron were still unwounded.

Ribeirac and Schomberg recommenced; the former was pierced through the breast, and Schomberg was wounded in the neck.

Ribeirac was mortally wounded, and Schomberg rushed on him and gave him another; but he, with his right hand, seized his opponent's, and with his left plunged his dagger into his heart.

Schomberg fell back, dragging Ribeirac with him. Livarot ran to aid Ribeirac to disengage himself from the grasp of his adversary, but was closely pursued by Maugiron, who cut open his head with a blow of his sword. Livarot let his sword drop, and fell on his knees; then Maugiron hastened to give him another wound, and he fell altogether.

Quelus and Maugiron remained against Antragues. Quelus was bleeding, but from slight wounds.

Antragues comprehended his danger; he had not the least wound, but he began to feel tired, so he pushed aside Quelus's sword and jumped over a barrier; but at the same moment, Maugiron attacked him behind; Antragues turned, and Quelus profited by this movement to get under the barrier.

"He is lost!" thought Chicot.

"Vive le roi!" cried D'Epernon.

"Silence, if you please, monsieur," said Antragues.

At this instant Livarot, of whom no one was thinking, rose on his knees, hideous from the blood with which he was covered, and plunged his dagger between the shoulders of Maugiron, who fell, crying out, "Mon Dieu! I am killed!"

Livarot fell back again, fainting.

"M. de Quelus," said Antragues, "you are a brave man; yield—I offer you your life."

"And why yield?"

"You are wounded, and I am not."

"Vive le roi!" cried Quelus; "I have still my sword!" And he rushed on Antragues, who parried the thrust, and, seizing his arm, wrested his sword from him, saying—

"Now you have it no longer."

"Oh, a sword!" cried Quelus; and, bounding like a tiger on Antragues, he threw his arms round him.

Antragues struck him with his dagger again and again, but Quelus managed to seize his hands, and twisted round him like a serpent, with arms and legs. Antragues, nearly suffocated, reeled and fell, but on the unfortunate Quelus. He managed to disengage himself, for Quelus's powers were failing him, and, leaning on one arm, gave him a last blow.

"Vive le r—" said Quelus, and that was all. The silence and terror of death reigned everywhere.

Antragues rose, covered with blood, but it was that of his enemy.

D'Epernon made the sign of the cross, and fled as if he were pursued by demons.

Chicot ran and raised Quelus, whose blood was pouring out from nineteen wounds.

The movement roused him, and he opened his eyes. "Antragues," said he, "on my honor, I am innocent of the death of Bussy."

"Oh! I believe you, monsieur," cried Antragues, much moved.

"Fly!" murmured Quelus; "the king will never forgive you."

"I cannot abandon you thus, even to escape the scaffold."

"Save yourself, young man," said Chicot; "do not tempt Providence twice in one day."

Antragues approached Ribeirac, who still breathed.

"Well?" asked he.

"We are victors," said Antragues, in a low tone, not to offend Quelus.

"Thanks," said Ribeirac; "now go."

And he fainted again.

Antragues picked up his own sword, which he had dropped, then that of Quelus, which he presented to him. A tear shone in the eyes of the dying man. "We might have been friends," he murmured.

"Now fly," said Chicot; "you are worthy of being saved."

"And my companions?"

"I will take care of them, as of the king's friends."

Antragues wrapped himself in a cloak which his squire handed to him, so that

no one might see the blood with which he was covered, and, leaving the dead and wounded, he disappeared through the Porte St. Antoine.

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE END.

THE king, pale with anxiety, and shuddering at the slightest noise, employed himself in conjecturing, with the experience of a practiced man, the time that it would take for the antagonists to meet and that the combat would last.

"Now," he murmured first, "they are crossing the Rue St. Antoine—now they are entering the field — now they have begun." And at these words the poor king, trembling, began to pray.

Rising again in a few minutes, he cried:

"If Quelus only remembers the thrust I taught him! As for Schomberg, he is so cool that he ought to kill Ribeirac; Maugiron, also, should be more than a match for Livarot. But D'Epernon, he is lost; fortunately he is one of the four whom I love least. But if Bussy, the terrible Bussy, after killing him, falls on the others! Ah, my poor friends!"

"Sire!" said Crillon, at the door.

"What! already?"

"Sire, I have no news but that the Duc d'Anjou begs to speak to your majesty."

"What for?"

"He says that the moment has come for him to tell you what service he rendered your majesty, and that what he has to tell you will calm a part of your fears."

"Well, let him come."

At this moment they heard a voice crying, "I must speak to the king at once!"

The king recognized the voice, and opened the door.

"Here, St. Luc!" cried he. "What is it? But, mon Dieu! what is the matter? Are they dead?"

Indeed, St. Luc, pale, without hat or sword, and spotted with blood, rushed into the king's room.

"Sire!" cried he, "vengeance! I ask for vengeance!"

"My poor St. Luc, what is it? You seem in despair."

"Sire, one of your subjects, the bravest, noblest, has been murdered this night—traitorously murdered!"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Sire, you do not love him, I know; but he was faithful, and, if need were, would have shed all his blood for your majesty, else he would not have been my friend."

"Ah!" said the king, who began to understand; and something like a gleam of joy passed over his face.

"Vengeance, sire, for M. de Bussy!"

"M. de Bussy?"

"Yes, M. de Bussy, whom twenty assassins poniarded last night. He killed fourteen of them."

"M. de Bussy dead?"

"Yes, sire."

"Then he does not fight this morning?"

St. Luc cast a reproachful glance on the king, who turned away his head, and, in doing so, saw Crillon still standing at the door. He signed to him to bring in the duke.

"No, sire, he will not fight," said St. Luc; "and that is why I ask, not for vengeance—I was wrong to call it so—but for justice. I love my king, and am, above all things, jealous of his honor, and I think that it is a deplorable service which they have rendered to your majesty by killing M. de Bussy."

The Duc d'Anjou had just entered, and St. Luc's words had enlightened the king as to the service his brother had boasted of having rendered him.

"Do you know what they will say?" continued St. Luc. "They will say, if your friends conquer, that it is because they first murdered Bussy."

"And who will dare to say that?"

"Pardieu! every one," said Crillon.

"No, monsieur, they shall not say that," replied the king, "for you shall point out the assassin."

"I will name him, sire, to clear your majesty from so heinous an accusation," said St. Luc.

"Well! do it."

The Duc d'Anjou stood quietly by.

"Sire," continued St. Luc, "last night they laid a snare for Bussy, while he visited a woman who loved him; the husband, warned by a traitor, came to his house with a troop of assassins; they were everywhere—in the street—in the courtyard, even in the garden."

In spite of his power over himself, the duke grew pale at these last words.

"Bussy fought like a lion, sire, but numbers overwhelmed him, and—"

"And he was killed," interrupted the king, "and justly; I will certainly not revenge an adulterer."

"Sire, I have not finished my tale. The unhappy man, after having defended himself for more than half an hour in the room, after having triumphed over his enemies, escaped, bleeding, wounded, and mutilated: he only wanted some one to lend him a saving hand, which I would have done had I not been seized by his assassins, and bound and gagged. Unfortunately they forgot to take away my sight as well as my speech, for I saw two men approach the unlucky Bussy, who was hanging on the iron railings. I heard him entreat them for help, for in these two men he had the right to reckon on two friends. Well, sire, it is horrible to relate—it was still more horrible to see and hear—one ordered him to be shot, and the other obeyed."

"And you know the assassins?" cried the king, moved in spite of himself.

"Yes," said St. Luc, and turning to the prince, with an expression of intense hatred, he cried, "the assassin, sire, was the prince, his friend."

The duke stood perfectly quiet and answered, "Yes, M. de St. Luc is right; it was I, and your majesty will appreciate my action, for M. de Bussy was my servant, it is true; but this morning he was to fight against your majesty."

"You lie, assassin!" cried St. Luc. "Bussy, full of wounds, his hands cut to pieces, a ball through his shoulder, and hanging suspended on the iron trellis-work, might have inspired pity in his most cruel enemies; they would have succored him. But you, the murderer of La Mole and of Coconnas, you killed Bussy, as you have killed, one after another, all your friends. You killed Bussy, not because he was the king's enemy, but because he was the confidant of your secrets. Ah! Monsoreau knew well your reason for this crime."

"Cordieu!" cried Crillon, "why am I not king?"

"They insult me before you, brother," said the duke, pale with terror.

"Leave us, Crillon," said the king.

The officer obeyed.

"Justice, sire, justice!" cried St. Luc again.

"Sire," said the duke, "will you punish me for having served your majesty's friends this morning?"

"And I," cried St. Luc, "I say that the cause which you espouse is accursed, and will be pursued by the anger of God. Sire, when your brother protects our friends, woe to them."

The king shuddered.

Then they heard hasty steps and voices, followed by a deep silence; and then, as if a voice from Heaven came to confirm St. Luc's words, three blows were struck slowly and solemnly on the door by the vigorous arm of Crillon.

Henri turned deadly pale.

"Conquered," cried he; "my poor friends!"

"What did I tell you, sire?" cried St. Luc. "See how murder succeeds."

But the king saw nothing, heard nothing; he buried his face in his hands, and murmured, "Oh! my poor friends; who will tell me about them?"

"I, sire," said Chicot.

"Well!" cried Henri.

"Two are dead, and the third is dying."

"Which is the third?"

"Quelus."

"Where is he?"

"At the Hotel Boissy."

The king said no more, but rushed from the room.

St. Luc had taken Diana home to his wife, and this had kept him from appearing sooner at the Louvre. Jeanne passed three days and nights watching her through the most frightful delirium.

On the fourth day, Jeanne, overcome by fatigue, went to take a little rest: two hours after, when she returned, Diana was gone. Quelus died at the Hotel Boissy, in the king's arms, after lingering for thirty days.

Henri was inconsolable. He raised three magnificent tombs for his friends, on which their effigies were sculptured, life-size, in marble. He had innumerable masses said for them, and prayed for their souls himself night and morning.

For three months Chicot never left his master, and consoled him as well as he could. In the month of September, Chicot received the following letter, dated from the Priory of Beaume:

"DEAR M. CHICOT—The air is soft in this place, and the vintage promises to be good this year. They say that the king, whose life I saved, still grieves much. Bring him to the priory, dear M. Chicot; we will give him wine of 1550, which I have discovered in my cellar, and which is enough to make one forget the greatest griefs; for I find in the Holy Writ these words, 'Good wine rejoices the heart of man.' It is in Latin. I will show it you. Come, then, dear M. Chicot; come, with the king, M. d'Epernon, and M. de St. Luc, and we will fatten them all.

"The reverend prior,

"DOM GORENFLOT,

"Your humble servant and friend.

"P.S.—Tell the king that I have not yet had time to pray for the souls of his friends; but when the vintage is over, I shall not fail to do so."

"Amen," said Chicot; "here are poor devils well recommended to Heaven."

END OF "CHICOT, THE JESTER."